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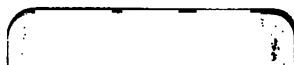
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NADINE.





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NADINE.

N A D I N E

The Study of a Woman.

BY

MRS. CAMPBELL PRAED,

AUTHOR OF "POLICY AND PASSION," "AN AUSTRALIAN HEROINE," ETC.

"Who can say 'Thus far, no farther,' to the tide of his own nature?
Who can mould the spirit's fashion to the counsel of his will?
Square his being by enactment—shape his soul to legislature—
Be himself his law of living, his own art of good and ill?"

J. Brunton Stephens.

NEW EDITION.

CHAPMAN & HALL, LIMITED,
11, HENRIETTA STREET, COVENT GARDEN.
1883.

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N A D I N E.

INTRODUCTORY.

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR.

“ A HARD frost—the most severe weather which we have known for years—has set the world sneezing, has broken up the hunting coteries, has filled the clubs with aimless loungers, has given an impetus to the sale of stalls at the theatres, increased the circulation of novels from Mudie’s, and—direst of results, as regards the comfort and good-temper of a quiet, studious recluse like myself—has covered with solid ice the lake at the bottom of my lawn, and has turned loose upon my borders a tribe of Goths and Vandals, whose shrieks of merriment pierce my unhappy ears even through stone walls and closed windows,

and cause me to anticipate mournfully the approaching horrors of luncheon and five o'clock tea.

“As I sit growling in my snuggerly—the only spot in the house sacred from the inroads of these barbarians—I find myself reflecting with the poet that art is long and time is fleeting, and am tempted to envy you the limpid skies and heavenly seas of the sunny south—the orange gardens and ilex groves in which you are doubtless enjoying delicious days of idleness at Pegli, and the near vicinity of the picture-galleries, the monuments, and glittering, if decayed, magnificence of Genoa. I am tempted also, at the risk of provoking your gentle raillery, to inflict upon you one of my long letters, which you have been pleased to compare variously with the ring of cracked china, the quaint, precise harmonies of the early Italian composers, and the ponderous if polished productions of the last century essayists. But pardon me for remarking that I prefer incurring the imputation of Johnsonian pomposity to that

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER TO THE AUTHOR. 3

of indulging in the slipshod English and slangy phraseology which marks the epistolary style of the 'young bloods' of the present age.

"While on the subject of poets, I am led to that particular one who has in reality inspired this letter. You will recollect— But no; I had forgotten that I was addressing you across a chasm of three decades. The name of Harold Calderwood will, I fear, convey to your mind no more distinct image than that of several neat duodecimo volumes of airy verse, which have probably since your childhood reposed undisturbed in their allotted places upon the shelves in your father's library. They and their author were the fashion of their day, but the writer has lived longer than his works. With me the poet, gallant, wit, *raconteur*,—a star which had attained its meridian while I was still a boy, and which has now sunk completely below the literary and social horizon,—has remained always a bright and invigorating memory.

“Last week, while lounging about London, I found myself in the boudoir of our charming friend the Transatlantic Hypatia, whose kindness of heart, as you are aware, is only equalled by her passion for the society of septua- and octogenarian celebrities. Our *tête-à-tête* was cut short by the announcement of the carriage.

“‘Now,’ said she, ‘I will reward you for having made yourself so agreeable by taking you with me to call upon the cleverest and most fascinating man in the world.’

“In faint protest I represented the inexpediency of placing my feeble flame in juxtaposition with the rays of this luminary.

“‘There’s something in that,’ said Hypatia. ‘I like modesty. But I guess that Mr. Calderwood’s brilliancy is a reflection from the past, and in a short time there’ll be nothing left of *his* light. If he could leap back forty years and you twenty, you might have cause for jealousy. As it is, he is like many of your British institutions—a magnificent ruin; and I advise you strongly, if you are fortun-

ate enough to please him, to cultivate his acquaintance, for he is fast crumbling to decay. He has brought his *chef* with him from Rome, and I can assure you, on the authority of my male friends, that no one in Europe gives more delicately composed dinners, or tells a naughty story with greater piquancy. Ah! he knows his world—as well he may do with the experience of nearly eighty years to teach him wisdom!’

“ ‘Madam,’ said I with a low bow, ‘wisdom of that kind is not confined to octogenarians.’

“ ‘But *I* am a philosopher,’ murmured she.

“I found my poet what she had described him—a magnificent ruin, crippled by slow paralysis of the limbs, but not of the brain; attenuated, worn, yet with still inexhaustible vitality beaming from his eyes and flowing with his talk—a stream witty, aphoristic, epigrammatic, in which there seemed scarcely any perceptible break. He recognized me—greeted me with warmth; and I accepted an invitation to dine with him upon the following evening.

"The party was a small one—Herbert the dramatist, Knowles the metaphysician, Dr. Weldon, whom you know by renown, our host, and myself.

"We sat late. Calderwood's unflagging vivacity seemed to inspire his guests. The talk glided into literary and sociological channels. *Apropos* of a remark made by Herbert upon the difficulty of selecting from the incidents and combinations in real life which present themselves as material to the observation of an author, such as, without shock to conventional purism, may be exhibited upon the stage, individual reminiscences and experiences of the tragic and sensational kind gathered thickly. Almost each one present had some harrowing tale to relate which had come under his personal knowledge, and the improbabilities of reality as compared with those of imagination were freely discussed.

"Some melodramatic and morbidly exciting situations were depicted by Dr. Weldon with the graphic force of an eye-witness, and

their recital was followed by a remark of Calderwood's.

“‘I think that I can cap that narrative, Doctor, interesting as it is. Herbert, I will give you the materials for an emotional drama, which at least possesses the merit of being absolute fact. I can vouch for the truth of what I am going to tell you; but I must beg that you will not exact chapter and verse of my authority. The heroine of the romance died several years ago. She was well known in European courts, and though I fancy most of you would be considerably astonished were I to reveal her name, in relating some incidents in her career, I am violating no confidence, and running no risk of betrayals injurious to any living person.’

“Calderwood then proceeded with his story. As I know that fact and fiction are to you equally fascinating, and that no gift could be more acceptable to you than the skeleton of a plot, I send you this one. Ere long I shall look for its appearance, clothed in flesh, reanimated, and dressed after modern

taste; but let me give you a word of advice. Do not delay in the execution of your projects. Herbert is deeply pondering the solution of certain delicate and technical difficulties, and is quoting the Greek tragedy as a magnificent precedent for realism upon the English stage."

* * * * *

BOOK I.

CHAPTER I.

PHYSICIAN, PRIEST, OR LOVER ?

“AND so you think that I have changed of late—since my visit to the Dormers in London. How ?”

The question was asked in a tone half arch, half melancholy, by a handsome girl seated before the pianoforte in a dim, old-fashioned, country drawing-room, and was addressed to a gentleman who, bending forward with his eyes fixed attentively upon her face, had been speaking in a low tone under cover of the music.

Not that there was any need to drown their voices. The only other occupant of the room, the girl's father, leaned back in a deep arm-chair, his fine profile outlined against the sombre upholstery, his gouty hands folded

across each other, while he slept the sleep of the aged.

It was nine in the evening. The curtains were drawn, and a log blazed in the fire-place. Wind howled without; the boughs of the beech-trees creaked, and though it was late in April, rainy sleet was driven against the window-panes. Within, the harmoniously tinted room adorned by vases of hot-house flowers, the many traces of feminine taste, the warm atmosphere scented with *pot-pourri*, were grateful to the senses and suggestive of all that is refined, tender, sympathetic.

Dr. Bramwell, so was named the gentleman by the piano, fancied that he detected a ring of emotion in Nadine Senguin's voice. Her tone seemed to challenge truth; her whole manner, he thought, was tinged by something at once defiant and appealing, artificial and yet deeply earnest. But he was in love, and to him Miss Senguin was a mystery as subtle as it was sweet.

Not the kind of man to grapple with mystery in the form of a beautiful woman.

Dr. Julian Bramwell, aged twenty-eight, in appearance heavy-browed, contemplative-looking; in face, square of conformation, and rather plain than handsome; had dealt all his life with the positive and knowable, and though he possessed a fair share of idealism, could not be said to have brought it under cultivation. It was not his tendency to put out feelers in emotional directions, or to glide gracefully over surface interests. Life was to him a serious business; his moods inclined to pessimism, while his soul burned to alleviate distress. He was talented and ambitious, and cherished visions of scientific discovery, of fame and—a secondary consideration—fortune. He had a clear, logical mind, the capacity for conceiving and carrying out a fixed purpose, and a strong faith in himself. This was fairly justified. He could walk between narrow lines, and if impulse ever prompted him to overstep them, he had the power of self-restraint. He believed himself to be a keen student of human nature. Success in diagnosis had thrown him into the error of over self-

confidence. He was mistaken in imagining that he understood Nadine Senguin. For that, he felt too deeply. Her blushes, smiles, transient humours furnished him with food for deep thought, and usually led him to conclusions graver than they apparently warranted, and most often erroneous. It is easier to read character by physiognomy while counting the beats of a patient's pulse, than to interpret the manner of a woman who knows herself beloved, while gazing into a pair of liquid eyes, that melt imperceptibly from grey to violet, and unconsciously magnetize the would-be magnetizer. These self-same orbs were full and soft, with deep lids, and strongly arched brows which imparted to the countenance an expression at once piquant and wistful. The forehead was low and broad, the nose straight and fine, the chin slightly pointed, too short for oval English beauty; the lips mobile—when smiling sweet, but melancholy in repose; the head sleek and small, with dusky hair, neither black nor brown, coiled on the nape of a slender neck; the complexion

was of a warm paleness, the whole colouring nondescript, hues blending into each other and producing an impression distinctly harmonious; while the face was relieved from the faintest suggestion of insipidity by an almost startling variety of expression. Miss Senguin's figure was slight, but tall and singularly supple. In her manner there was sufficient sadness blended with vivacity to pique curiosity; her voice was low, and her speech, even when she talked commonplace, had the peculiarity of arousing interest and conjecture.

"Well!" she asked, ceasing in her playing for a moment and looking at him full. "In what way have I changed?"

He hesitated.

"It is but natural that you should have gained in grace, brilliancy, self-possession. The consciousness of admiration must, I should imagine, have this effect upon a woman so young as you. But that is not what I mean: the alteration is more subtle. It is difficult to define what is indefinable. Your manner was always variable; now it is more

so than ever ; sometimes, indeed, I fancy that you have a cause for trouble which is a secret to the world. The thought grieves me deeply. Yet underlying everything, there is a softness, a tenderness which—" He paused for a moment. "This makes me happy ; I hardly know why. I think that I can express in one word what I want to convey. You are more *sympathique*."

"You find me so ?"

"Is it presumptuous to answer—yes ?"

"No. I am in a strange humour. You are right in calling me variable. I give you free permission to say to me this evening what you choose."

"Do you know, Miss Senguin, what that permission implies ?"

He spoke meaningly, and bending forward tried to meet her eyes, while he lightly touched her right hand, which again drew music from the keys of the piano.

She did not at once reply, then said slowly—

"Perhaps I can guess. But I warn you that I am in a 'mood' to-night, and not

responsible for my words or my manner. Do not blame me, Dr. Bramwell, if you receive false impressions. I don't wish to give them, but—this is the truth—I do not understand myself.”

“There cannot be any question of false impressions,” he said energetically. “If you were less simple, less frank, you would in all ways have more confidence in the beauty of your own nature.”

“Then I may feel that everything we say to each other is ‘without prejudice’? Do you know that you produce in me an impulsive reliance upon you which makes me wish to judge of myself by your opinion of me?”

“If that were the case,” he answered with repressed passion, “you would see nothing in your own character but what is noble and lovable.”

“Ah me! It would be well if you could put your spectacles upon the eyes of others. Not that one would care to be examined critically or even approvingly by everybody in the world, but it is elevating to the

character to be thought better of than it deserves. For one thing, if all persons believed one to be pure and good there would be no possibility of being tempted. . . . You doctors have a great many physical theories about germs," she added in a tone of forced gaiety. "Do you believe, morally speaking, that the seeds of evil can lie latent in a person's nature for years, and then be suddenly developed in a month—a day—by something, some one, outside oneself, so that one's very temperament is reversed, and one is borne on a tide of longing towards what is evil? . . . And the strange thing is, that one is almost persuaded it is not evil, but a righteous murdering of instincts, which seem to be the fruit of perhaps a false idea of morality."

She had begun lightly, but as she concluded, her lips trembled, her voice grew deeply earnest.

"I wish that you would speak plainly," exclaimed Dr. Bramwell, anxiously. "What do you mean?"

"Only this. Do you think it possible that a woman, say a girl like me, could become suddenly depraved in mind?"

"Depraved! Nadine! how can you use such a word in connection with yourself—you who are the embodiment of truth and purity? It is wrong of you to say such things; I cannot bear to hear them. I will not discuss such a possibility."

Miss Senguin's head drooped. She stopped playing again, and timidly touched his arm.

"You see it is impossible for us, in a mental sense, to face each other fairly. We are too different. I know that you haven't any faith in angels or devils or anything else supernatural. I have a strong one. I am morbidly superstitious, and I have a fancy that at times one's good and evil genii have the power of personifying themselves in particular individuals. Well, Dr. Bramwell, I am inclined to think that *you* are my good genius at present. When I am with you, morbid impulses and wicked thoughts become unreal or grimly laughable. My nature seems to find some-

thing which it needs, in yours. There's not the least element of personal attraction in this feeling; I almost wish there were. I am very honest with you, even at the risk of your thinking me unwomanly. What does it matter? What does anything matter? But one goes through phases of experience in which one feels the most intense need of help. It is so with me now. Do not, however, misunderstand me. There is nothing definite that I can confide to you. You can best help me by taking no notice of my mood, by letting me say what is passing through my mind, without attaching too great importance to my words. You say that I am variable. Think that I am this evening what I shall not be to-morrow, what I shall perhaps never be again. I want a figurative handclasp. Sympathy—the knowledge that some one whose judgment we respect cares for us, and expects good from us, is, when we are tossed about and troubled and uncertain of ourselves, the greatest help . . . But—why should I speak?—Dr. Bramwell, do you think, that I am looking well?"

"Oh! say what is in your mind! No, you do not look well now. When I came this evening you seemed to me full of brightness, but at this moment your eyes are heavy and your face is almost haggard."

"That is not surprising. All last night I lay awake. I do so during many nights. It is wretched work: every sound jars my nerves; my head throbs, and the same weary thoughts fly round and round in my brain. I am afraid of opium: it makes me dream, and dreams are the mockery of reality. I am afraid of a great many things, but I am most of all afraid of myself."

"Nadine," cried Dr. Bramwell, "you bid me take no notice of your words; but how is that possible? All this is new to me. You do not know how you distress me. You are unhappy, and I yearn to comfort you, if I might—if I dared. I beseech you to place confidence in me. You have said already that instinctively your nature turns for support to mine. Ah, you cannot realize how happy those words have made me. But what I feel

is nothing. . . . I only wish you to know that all I ask is to serve you. I am convinced that your mind is preyed upon by some inward morbid exaggeration of outward circumstance, which will cease to affect you painfully when you can disburthen yourself of it to another. Tell me—Is your trouble in any way connected with your visit to the Dormers?"

Nadine bent involuntarily, as it were, towards him, began to speak, then hesitated. Anxiety showed itself in her eyes as their searching, melancholy gaze met that of his; doubt and irresolution were upon her parted lips. A struggle was waging within her. . . . Suddenly, the flicker of impulse died out of her face and left it cold and still. He felt intuitively that a look, a gesture,—on his part unconscious,—had arrested speech on hers.

"Nadine!" he exclaimed imploringly.

His voice seemed to recall her to herself. She shook her head mournfully.

"No," she murmured, not in answer to his question, but as if replying to one which had

presented itself to her own mind; then added, with what appeared to be an affectation of indifference, "I am going next week to stay with the Dormers for the Chollerton races. I hear that you also are to be there."

"Nadine," cried Bramwell impetuously, "you are not true to yourself—or to me. How can I convince you of my entire longing to help you—how convey to you the devotion, the worship that is within my heart? My deepest sympathy is yours—and more, far more, if you will have it so. Speak to me. Let me know what is grieving you. Something tells me that when we meet at Croxham it will be too late, and the impulse to confide in me will have passed away."

Nadine smiled with sad bitterness.

"You are right. When we meet at Croxham *it may be too late*. . . . No. Do not urge me further. You cannot help me; I will not ask you to try. I need a priest more than a doctor—if I could believe in the priest! My trouble lies in myself, and is caused by my own nature. Why should I struggle against

irresistible bent? What you say is true. My feelings are morbid. They are unreal, and must be dealt with as one deals with phantoms. Let us talk no more of my imaginary griefs: you would be the first to attribute them to an over-excited condition of the nervous system. Tell me something of yourself."

"To speak of myself is to talk of *you*. My life is bound up in yours. I have no hope for the future apart from you. You know this. . . . Nadine, you *know* that I love you."

CHAPTER II.

ON THE BRINK OF THE PRECIPICE.

NADINE raised her hands with a shrinking gesture.

"Do not tell me of this—not now."

"Yes, *now*," cried Bramwell vehemently. "I came this evening for no other purpose, and it is impossible, Nadine, that this can be a surprise to you."

"Ah! Have I the power of reading thoughts? . . . No. You deserve frankness. I did suspect it. But I knew that it is your *métier* to study character; and I might have supposed your interest in me to be partly scientific. You are rather cold-blooded, Dr. Bramwell."

"*Am* I cold-blooded? How little you know me!"

He bent suddenly close to her, and his eyes glowed upon hers.

"Do not awaken papa. He is sleeping so quietly, dreaming his happy dreams of old-world fables, inspired perhaps by a new religion or a new mystical philosophy. Who would not cast off all ties with the present if they could—and live in the past?"

"Nadine," said Dr. Bramwell, more gently, "if you had reason for thinking me cold and self-contained, it is that my position with regard to your father, and the almost daily contact with you, into which it brought me, obliged me to place a strong guard upon my feelings. A doctor is not on the same footing as an ordinary acquaintance."

"No; and it is partly upon that account that I have talked to you so frankly, and have come to lean upon you."

"It was a false position," replied Bramwell, "and every time your clear eyes met mine I felt it more keenly. Now I have put an end

to it, and I can speak. My dearest hope is to win you for my wife. I know that I could make you happy. I love you passionately. In time my love would compel yours. I am certain of this. You have admitted that there is sympathy between our natures. In your case, it would become something stronger; nay, but for your maidenly reserve it might now be love. I speak in all reverence: you are sacred to me; but we are face to face now as man and woman. I meant to speak to-night. I meant that we should stand fairly to each other. I do not wish for any definite promise from you. Of course there is disparity. I would not ask you to share my lot unless I had something better to offer you than that of a country doctor's wife. I have given up my practice here and am going to London. Through my writings I have already gained some sort of repute. I am ambitious, and I feel in me the elements of success. I *will* succeed for the sake of winning you. In a short time I shall not be ashamed to come to you boldly. Now, I ask nothing, unless it be a

word, bidding me either hope or despair utterly."

Miss Senguin's only answer was a plaintive chord that preluded a wistful melody.

"Do you know this?" she asked.

"It is something of Schumann's, is it not?" he answered impatiently.

"Träumerei. Dreams," she said in a melancholy tone, "idle fancy! But dreaming is pleasant, even though we know that there must be sorrowful awakening."

A sense of blankness and desolation fell with her words upon Dr. Bramwell.

"Are my hopes then only dreams?" he asked bitterly. "Must I go away despairing?"

"Do not either despair or hope," she replied. "Wait. Leave me in peace for a little while, till I see where fate means to strand me."

"Tell me," he said. "Is there any other man whom you love, and who wishes to marry you?"

She did not answer immediately, then said with a forced laugh—

“There is not any one in the world whom I love—and who wishes to marry me.”

“Then I am content,” said Dr. Bramwell. “I see light in the future.”

“Don’t deceive yourself. Don’t build plans upon me. You know that I am a person of moods. I am not to be depended upon. There are two creatures within me fighting against each other, and no one can say which will conquer. It would be better if you believed me vain and heartless; better that you should wean yourself from loving me. If you will not, or cannot, you must accept the consequences. If it is my fate to make you unhappy I too shall suffer; but at least I shall have warned you.”

“You talk as though it were possible to choose whom one would or would not love. It is happiness to me to think of you, even though it be sadly; and to try and wean myself from you would be to tear away a part of my being.”

"Would you still find happiness in loving me, though you knew that I could never be yours?"

"Do not bid me believe that. I cannot—I will not. But even if it were so—yes."

"Then be happy," said Nadine with a bewitching smile. "But," she added, "I have a bargain to make with you—a selfish, one-sided bargain. I will accept your love and be grateful, and—yes, I will *try* to return it; but it must be on condition that you do not tell me of it, at least till—"

"Till I am in a position to claim you for my own," interrupted Bramwell triumphantly.

"No, that is taking things far too much for granted. Say till—if such a day ever comes—I confide in you freely. Dr. Bramwell, I bid you think the worst of me that you can. If I obeyed my better self I would send you away and tell you to forget me. Think of me as heartless and selfish, as unwilling to lose your admiration,—if you prefer the word,—your sympathy, or what is more true, loth to deprive myself

of the good which I gain from your belief in me. . . . Oh, I am sacrificing you to my wandering impulses! What shall I do? Tell me what to do."

"To serve you at any cost would be no sacrifice."

He bent till his lips touched her hand. She shivered slightly and drew it gently away. Then compunction seized her, and she allowed her fingers to rest for an instant upon his, in a caress that she might have bestowed upon a faithful dog.

"I think that you would be very loyal," she murmured—"more loyal than I deserve. But at Croxham next month you will not let any one suspect an understanding of this sort. You must not single me out, or be aggrieved if you see me monopolized by other men."

"I shall only be at Croxham for a few days. I should not have accepted Mrs. Dormer's invitation had it not been for the temptation of meeting you there. Miss Senguin, your wishes shall be respected, and after to-night my love shall be silent."

"You are very good to me," said Nadine earnestly. "You have always been good to me since that day when I thought papa was dying, and you comforted me. . . . Life is very difficult," she went on in a dreamy tone. "It seems a perpetual struggle of what 'is' against what 'might have been.' Circumstance shapes not only our fate, but ourselves. If some one or something were different then we might be either better or worse. That is what is so hard. A little earlier—a little later—never at all. It is all a throw of the die. . . . You look very mournful. Does what I say distress you?"

"It would give me the deepest pain," answered Dr. Bramwell gravely, "were it not that, in spite of your half-repulse, I still hope one day to possess the key to your thoughts. You are very complex. A few months ago I thought that I understood you; to-night, I am further from doing so than if I had met you for the first time yesterday."

"And does not that thought depress and deter you?"

"No; for to me you are the noblest, truest woman living, and I *will* win your heart."

"My heart! Oh, I am cruel, false—all that is most base. I must say this; it relieves me. I have no healthy, emotional impulses. I should make a bad wife, an indifferent mother. And even in fighting against the evil within me I am calculating, I am capable of anything—capable even of marrying you as a refuge from myself. . . . Don't look so horrified and bewildered," she added in a different tone. "You mustn't think that I really mean all the wild things I say. It amuses me; it is a safety-valve. I am very wayward. I dare say that you find me perplexing, but you must consider how lonely I am; there's no one to whom I can open my mind. I have only papa in the world, and, poor dear! I would suffer anything rather than that he should be worried by my whims and vagaries. I always had a feeling, Dr. Bramwell, that you would in some way be mixed up with my life. Perhaps for that reason I have talked to you so oddly and

impulsively. It would be foolish to take my confessions too seriously. I had theories about you. I felt a strong desire to verify them; but the worst of being interested in people is that one is always wanting to make experiments, and to do or say something utterly untrue, but which, by means of their interpretation of it, would throw a new light upon their character. . . .”

At this moment a gentle movement in the arm-chair announced that the sleeper had returned to consciousness. Miss Senguin plunged abruptly into a rather difficult concerto, by Handel, which lay open on the music-desk. It was the signal for Dr. Bramwell to rise, while Mr. Senguin straightened himself and stirred his cold coffee, trying to make believe that he had not been asleep.

“Your music is very pretty, Nadine. I missed it in the evenings when you were away, and should have felt lonely indeed if this good doctor had not sometimes taken compassion on me. Not that I would for the world keep you buried here. Young people

must have their chances of making the best they can out of life. Go on playing, my love; and, Bramwell, what do you say if we have our game of *écarté*?"

Dr. Bramwell acquiesced. The card-table was set out, and presently both gentlemen were seated at it, while Nadine continued at the piano. As he shuffled the cards Mr. Senguin's eyes wandered towards his daughter with a glance of admiration, and his head nodded in time to the crisp, stately measure.

"How do you think she is looking?" he asked, but fortunately did not wait for a reply. "Improved in appearance, eh? but her spirits seem to me a little variable. Naturally so. London even in winter is a more exciting place than Alston. I have been reproaching myself, Doctor, for not sending Nadine to town in the season. You should have heard Mrs. Dormer's views upon the subject; she has offered to chaperone her this year. Hitherto I have selfishly thought only of my own present comfort, and have not considered her future; but that must not go

on. I should like to 'see her well married before I die. There! I had almost forgotten to mark the king. . . . Mrs. Dormer, oh yes, she was over here yesterday with a sort of distant connection, Colonel Halkett. He is staying at Croxham. . . . Dear me! how many years that name carries me back. I was his father's fag at Eton, and we were in the embassy together at St. Petersburg. Regie Halkett was my best man. Of course you are aware that my wife was a Russian. It sometimes strikes me 'that a certain peculiarity of temperament which you may have observed in Nadine is inherited from her mother. Time passes. Halkett married some years afterwards, and this is his eldest son—a handsome fellow in the Blues; but there is a queer story about *his* wife. She went mad after the birth of their first child, and is in confinement, I am told. A melancholy way of being handicapped; but it is said that he has his consolations. . . . I win the trick. You never proposed, so I mark two. The Dormers have a large party on

the sixth for the Chollerton races. I hear that you are to be there: your farewell, I suppose, to your old friends. Nadine goes next week, and I am left to the fate of the old and infirm—solitude. However, I don't grumble. And so your successor has arrived. Bring him over soon and introduce him; and, for Heaven's sake, Bramwell, go thoroughly into my case with him. How I shall exist when you leave us, I really cannot imagine. The position is too terrible to be contemplated."

Nadine abruptly ceased playing and advanced to the fireplace. Here she stood without speaking, one arm resting upon the oak mantleshef, her forehead shaded by her hand.

Shifting his position a few moments later, Bramwell had an opportunity of observing her face as it was reflected in the mirror opposite him. She was apparently gazing at her own image, but in her eyes there was a look of melancholy, almost of despair, so intense that it startled him. He involuntarily uttered her name and recalled her to herself.

"Your expression alarmed me," he said apologetically. "The lamp threw a ghastly shade upon your face. I fancied that you might be ill."

Miss Senguin met his glance of troubled inquiry with one of her doubtful smiles.

"No; I was only thinking. . . . Dreaming," she added mournfully, "dreams of the future, in which one sometimes sees warning ghosts. . . . Ah, papa," she continued, with a sudden animation, "you don't know how superstitious the Dormers have made me! Henceforth your spiritualistic *séances*, your mediums, and your astrological studies shall be sacred from my ridicule. I intend to bring you back a perfect *repertoire* of ghost stories from Croxham. There is a mysterious white lady who walks the central corridor, and there are unearthly sounds and unaccountable lights, all of which I mean seriously to investigate. Dr. Bramwell, you are an inveterate sceptic, but in the interests of science I shall call upon you for your co-operation."

BOOK II.

CHAPTER I.

THE FORESHADOWING OF DRAMA.

DR. BRAMWELL did not see Miss Senguin again before her departure for Croxham, to which hospitable abode she had been bidden a week earlier than the less intimate friends who were invited for the Chollerton Races.

The Dormers were seldom at any time alone, and besides her host's family, Nadine found at Croxham, Colonel Halkett, the gentleman spoken of by Mr. Senguin to Dr. Bramwell; Miss Curtis, a handsome, indolent heiress, the niece of Mrs. Dormer, whom the latter—plain, clever, charming, and slightly satirical—catalogued to Nadine as follows:—
“My dear, she is a small soul oppressed by a large body. One feels quite a sympathy

for the over-weight of fine flesh. She won't bore us. She may stay five days and she may stay five weeks. It depends upon how the supply of French novels holds out. I have taken care to lay in a stock from Rolandi's, and have directed her attention to the most springy arm-chair in the house. She is a beautiful piece of furniture which eats, and has a weakness for truffles;" Mrs. Bartelotte, commonly called Clem Bartelotte, a pretty, vivacious American, with her husband, a travelled gentleman of varied accomplishment, which ranged between a facility for deciphering Egyptian hieroglyphics and for taking successfully the stiffest Leicestershire bullfinches; a young diplomatist who knew everybody and everything, and who was suspected of admiration for Nadine, and serious designs upon Miss Curtis; and finally, Mr. Jem Orinthaite, a north-country squire, who had been discovered a short time before by Harry Dormer in the act of gazing disconsolately into the Serpentine, and upon being asked what he was doing, replied grimly, "Waiting

for November," whereupon Mr. Dormer represented that Chollerton Races might be a poor but temporary substitute for fox-hunting, and carried him off in triumph to Croxham.

The party was small enough for sociability, and sufficiently large to subdivide conveniently into twos upon occasions. Croxham was a charming country house full of resources, so close to London that it was well in the world, and offered workers or pleasure-seekers agreeable opportunities for running down to dinner and returning by a well-timed midnight train. Mrs. Dormer was Catholic in her tastes and Bohemian in her proclivities; and she was one of the few hostesses who contrive to amalgamate successfully the country element with that of London life.

There was a sense of freedom in the atmosphere; cigarettes were tolerated in most places, and conversation always flowed freely, even verging sometimes on innocent laxity. A good deal of money was lost and won in the evenings at loo and poker. Flirtation, which might have been considered compro-

missing, was accepted in good faith. "*Honi soit qui mal y pense*" represented Mrs. Dormer's social creed, and frisky matrons, well known on the Promenade des Anglais, and familiar with Monte Carlo, found ample opportunities for diversion during the spring and autumn gaieties at Croxham.

At the present crisis, this freedom from restraint and absence of ill-natured comment or disagreeable suspicion was particularly grateful to Nadine Senguin. Her temperament possessed all the Slavonic pliability. She seemed to have cast aside those tragic forebodings at which she had hinted in her conversation with Dr. Bramwell, and had assumed, with her pretty London gowns, a reckless vivacity of manner which rendered her the very life of the party. A demon of restlessness appeared to have entered into her; it was as though she found silence and solitude insupportable even for an hour. She rode and walked a good deal with her host and with Colonel Halkett. She entered with eagerness into Mrs. Dormer's plans for enter-

taining her guests—romped with the children, played lively music, and sang gay French songs with the *entrain* of a *vivandière*, chattered to Mrs. Bartelotte, and except at the rare moments when her body was still and her face in repose, looked as though she had not a care to cloud her girlish levity.

The Chollerton Races were to take place on the seventh and eighth of May, and on the afternoon of the sixth all the party, with the exception of Dr. Bramwell, who was momentarily expected, were assembled in the hall at Croxham, where Mrs. Dormer, looking particularly quaint and original in her trim serge costume, was pouring out tea, and with the tact which made her so popular, was doing her best to remove the slight stiffness that so often follows the arrival of a bevy of strangers.

The hall at Croxham was an attractive lounging-place, and was more frequently occupied than any other room in the house. Now, though it was broad daylight without, and the scent of lilac and narcissus floated

in through one open window, a blazing log surmounted the great heap of white ashes upon the hearth, and the bright reflections from the antique silver tea-service, the steaming muffins upon their brass tripod before the fire, and the presence of two lazy-looking dackshunds curled up upon the hearthrug, seemed more in harmony with a touch of rawness in the air than with any preconceived notions of our merry month of May.

The dark panelled walls, hung with family portraits and ornamented with china plaques and old willow-patterned dishes; the sombrely-tinted screens and tapestry *portières*; the oak bookcases, and dusky recesses lighted with vivid spots of colour, in the shape of some gorgeous, quaintly-fashioned vase from the East, some antique brazen shield, rich piece of bric-a-brac or stand of azaleas or calceolarias, formed an harmonious background to the scattered groups. It was a charming scene, rendered doubly so by the living element of attractive women and men, possessing more or less the air of distinction

which good breeding imparts. All were talking—the elder gentlemen somewhat apart, their deep tones, as they discussed sport or politics, contrasting with the ladies' milder voices, and with the not unmelodious twang of Mrs. Bartelotte, who, attired in the most 'fetching' of tea gowns, leaned back in a basket-chair, with her pretty, pert face turned towards Mr. Ormthwaite, while she stroked the golden hair of Mrs. Dormer's little girl of three. Mrs. Bartelotte had a way of rippling on about nothing in particular, which filled up pauses; and as her discourse was accompanied by much graceful gesticulation, it was agreeable to eye and ear.

"Well, I must say I do admire children, they're so round and soft, and their dimples are so 'cute. You should see my baby, Mrs. Dormer; she's real lovely. I intend to have her portrait painted. I wish you'd tell me of a young artist that's going to be a celebrity; it's always best to catch them young. I thought I had discovered a treasure the other day. He was an Italian. His name

was Count Dam'mi. It sounds like an ob-jurgation, don't it, Mr. Ormthwaite? He had a title as long as my arm, and I assure you that was the shortest part of it. I wasn't going to lose sight of him, so I took him all the way from Rome to Freckenham. Gerald said that if I chose to buy him a new suit of clothes, and half-a-dozen shirts, and pay his washing-bills, I might keep him. I guess he was dear at the price, that Count. I must say he wasn't a success. Gerald thought he'd show him something of English country life, and took him out shooting. He had a passion for improving his mind; I will say that for Count Dam'mi. You should have seen his get-up: he turned out armed like a desperado. I'm sure I don't know what he expected; but I must say he wasn't altogether pleased. This is what he remarked when he came back. You must just imagine a creature like a shrimp, with beady black eyes and an imperial." Mrs. Bartelotte executed a little pantomimic description. "I do not onderstand ze way ze English gentle-

men make sport. Zey shoot ze little birds; I shoot ze brigands.' I calculate," added Mrs. Bartelotte reflectively, "there was nothing paltry about *his* ideas. . . . Now, Colonel Halkett, there isn't the least use in your eyeing a certain young lady in that savage fashion, for she is appropriated already, so come and give me the straight tip for the Chollerton Cup, for I've got to replenish my purse after all my losses at poker."

Nadine Senguin, the object of Mrs. Bartelotte's observation, was seated in a window recess at the further end of the room. Her gaze was fixed upon the carriage-drive, which from her position she commanded. She looked feverish and excited. Upon each cheek glowed a spot of carmine. Her lips were parted in an artificial smile, but her eyes wore a melancholy expression, and she turned an abstracted ear to the conversation of her companion, a small, sandy-whiskered man, one of Mrs. Dormer's gifted *protégés*, whose claims to social consideration rested upon the practice of palmistry and a general

proficiency in such-like recondite arts; and who had now launched himself upon a stream of discourse tending towards his favourite topics.

"You don't remember me, Miss Senguin; that was not to be expected; but *I* have seen you. Do you recollect a conversazione at the South Kensington, and a lecture upon 'Physiognomical Diversities in European Races' given by Deodatus Lumley? Imagine an existence weighted by the name of Deodatus! Don't you pity me? You were there with Mrs. Dormer and Colonel Halkett. I have a keen eye for faces that are out of the common. Yours puzzled me, for I could not at first determine your nationality. Oh, I know all about it now. You are half Russian. Mrs. Dormer enlightened me; but not before my inner consciousness had evolved the fact from your voice and appearance."

Miss Senguin turned her face towards Mr. Lumley, her eyebrows delicately elevated, a faint gleam of interest in her eyes.

"The feminine Russian type," continued

he, didactically, "is at once languorous and *spirituelle*, passionate and cold, impulsive and subtle. All these characteristics foretold drama in life."

"Ah, drama is pleasant!" murmured Nadine.

"You will make it. I see tragedy shadowed forth in your nostrils. Do not dilate them so scornfully, Miss Senguin. Let me refer you to Lavater for information on that point; and to go further, I have not the least doubt that the testimony of your nose will be confirmed by the lines of your palm."

Nadine, with a gesture of curiosity, tendered her slim and exquisitely-shaped hand, upon which glittered several valuable rings. Mr. Lumley took it within his own, turned it over, and, while examining it with apparent minuteness, continued talking in his serio-comic manner.

"To a student of pathognomy, Miss Senguin, the hand is a book which contains the secrets of human nature; no line or curve, no mound or indenture is without significance.

The shape of a finger-nail may determine belief. Success or failure, the struggles of ambition, the pangs of defeat may be read on this little elevation," and he lightly touched the edge of Nadine's palm. "Destiny speaks in the line descending from the second finger, and the workings of the heart are revealed in this chain-like tracing, which, alas ! tells of emotional ebbings and flowings, of instability of attachment, pain inflicted, loyalty ill-requited. Ah me ! a melancholy record. Do you shrink ? Shall I continue ? "

"Pray go on," said Nadine, her egotism piqued ; "but you generalize too much. Tell me something more definite."

"You have a clear intellect, too much in subjection to your impulses for your safety or peace of mind. You are now, or shortly will be, dominated by a passion that will materially affect the course of your life."

Nadine started, and looked keenly at the fortune-teller, but his eyes were fixed intently upon her palm. She answered in a tone of raillery—

"And yet you say that I am inconstant."

"True; but in this case— Do you really wish to know what I see?"

Nadine nodded.

"Passion is arrested almost in the hour of consummation by sudden death."

The gravity of Mr. Lumley's manner produced a strong effect upon Miss Senguin. She turned very pale and half withdrew her hand.

"Not your own death," he added, reassuringly. "A prosperous marriage, health, and long life are promised you. Was I not right? Your nature *does* present the elements of drama. But you need not fear personal disaster; you will be in peril, but you will escape from it. I am not altogether a prophet of evil. Your line of Saturn points to a brilliant career; here is denoted the favour of princes. Wealth and social distinction will be yours."

"And happiness?" asked Nadine, "for it seems to me that your bag of blessings is weighted by curses."

“Ah, happiness! That is indeed hard to define. Who is happy? Shall you be happy on the box seat of Dormer’s drag to-morrow, even though you know yourself to be the envy of professional beauties, and are certain of an invitation to the Blues’ ball? There will be an east wind, or you will have the wrong person beside you,” added Mr Lumley, plaintively. “There always is an east wind in life, except when one wants it to keep bores away.”

Nadine laughed nervously. The sound of carriage-wheels without attracted her eyes to the window; but again her gaze drooped towards her lap, and she appeared lost in contemplation of the hand which no longer rested in that of Mr. Lumley. It was only a fly laden with luggage that had driven round to the side entrance. She did not speak for a few moments; her attention had wandered.

Mr. Lumley observed her abstraction, and rattled on with commendable tact.

“What a delightful old hall this is,

especially at this hour! It is the fashion with our neighbours across the Channel to ridicule the Anglo tea mania, but it has certainly an element of the picturesque. Five o'clock tea, charming faces, old oak, faded tapestry, and blue China,—all the accessories complete for a genre picture,—and a faint suggestion of ghostly presence in the background. The soul of an æsthete could not more desire. Here's Halkett, Miss Senguin, making for you with a tea-cup in one hand and a cream-jug in the other. His mission in life is to amuse, and as *I* am not even interesting you,—your eyes are more truthful than your lips,—I'll give him my chair, and go and make myself useful in carrying about the muffins."

CHAPTER II.

A LOVER *A LA MODE*.

COLONEL HALKETT might have posed as a nineteenth century hero of that now familiar type which combines the muscular with the sentimental. Capacity for all the finer emotions did not in his case appear incompatible with proficiency in every manly pursuit. One could have foretold that women would find him an irresistible suitor, and men an excellent boon companion. He was tall and spare, with straight features, a blonde moustache, and fierce, melancholy eyes, which seemed now to seek a return glance from those of Miss Senguin; but, strange to say, she hardly looked up as he approached, nor did she address him any word of thanks when she accepted the cup of tea which he had brought her.

He seated himself in the chair which Mr. Lumley had vacated.

"Why do you watch the carriage-drive?" he asked. "Are you expecting any one?"

"Yes. There is another guest still to arrive."

"Some one in whom you are interested? Happy person!"

"It would be more true to say that he is interested in me," replied Nadine, smiling artificially.

"Ah!" said Colonel Halkett; "a gentleman! That makes all the difference. I retract my exclamation. He has my pity."

Their glances met: hers full, troubled, vaguely fearful; his deep-set, fiery, with the faintest element of mastery.

"I give you false impressions," said Nadine, bending forward and speaking impulsively. "My regard for Dr. Bramwell—you know, I have spoken to you of him—is really strong, only it is abstract, not personal. His feelings, his hopes, his future are no great concern of mine. If he were unhappy I should be sorry,

but it would not touch me deeply. Oh! I am ashamed of being so cold-blooded. . . . But it is true that he influences me powerfully; and his influence has usually the disagreeable effect of making me miserable. Do you know why? His greatest weakness is in believing me good. . . . Ah!" she added, and her eyes seemed to shine through tears, "what a mockery it is to talk of free will when one considers how entirely we are at the mercy of circumstances which we do not make, and of people who master us whether we will have it so or not."

"No," said Colonel Halkett, "we are mastered by our own emotions, passions—all within ourselves that makes life positive and worth the living. This is not a bondage to be mourned, but the happy servitude of higher natures which frees them from the galling chain of circumstance; if with it there is sometimes pain and rebellion, does it not bring also the most exquisite bliss?"

"You call it so? It seems to me that joy is born in the death-throes of all that is best

in our nature. And what is left? What follows? This is the thing I want to know. This is the thought which haunts me."

At that moment Dr. Bramwell was announced. His grave presence, the square, heavy brow, dark, thoughtful eyes, and air of reserve and preoccupation, seemed in a vague, but apparent manner to affect the whole party. Those with whom he was acquainted smiled upon his entrance, after a fashion less conventional than their wont; and the strangers watched with an expression of awakened interest the approach of a man whose lately published investigations in certain imperfectly explored fields of mental physiology, had attracted the attention of the College of Physicians, and had caused his name to be quoted in such popular and scientific journals as might be found upon the drawing-room tables of the fashionable world. As he advanced, Mrs. Dormer rose, greeting him warmly. The eyes of both Miss Senguin and Colonel Halkett followed his movements, and the latter remarked,—

"So that is the man who you say exercises a queer sort of moral influence over you. He prescribes for your mental as well as your physical ailments—a convenient combination of the functions of priest and doctor. It is a curious fancy of yours. . . . I wish," he exclaimed in low, earnest tones, "that I could draw you out of this current of morbid, exciting thought, which is poisoning for you all the sweetness of life."

"Do you think that it becomes *you* to reproach me because—?"

She hesitated; her eyes drooped, and a faint colour rose to her cheeks.

"Because you have come to me, like an angel to one in despair, and have taught me the meaning of happiness?"

"No, no, no. Because I can never be again the girl Dr. Bramwell now imagines me to be."

"Why will you not believe that you are one of those women by whom men are redeemed?" whispered Colonel Halkett, passionately—"the women who win honour and devotion by noble self-surrender."

"Honeyed words! Sweet, but false, false! They are like lulling narcotics. But after dreamy delight comes the reaction of misery. That is the way with me. I feel happy sometimes—yes, very happy, and then . . . There are two creatures within me, which are always torturing each other: the one cold, self-analyzing, calculating; the other impulsive, variable, daring. You know both. I read in some book the other day that this dual temperament is characteristic of the Russian type. There again, you see, is an instance of our subjection to forces beyond the control of our will. But this is not the place, and we are not the kind of people to discuss metaphysics. For us life is too real." Nadine rose and advanced a few steps. "Mrs. Dormer," she said, "do you think that I may venture to ask for some roses to wear this evening, or is your gardener a tyrant?"

"I have no doubt, my dear, that he will be a slave to you. But as Dr. Bramwell is the old man's especial favourite, I advise you to take him with you."

Nadine turned to her lover and gave him her hand, smiling bewitchingly.

"You have come from Alston to-day? And have you seen papa?" she asked. "Now you must tell me all about the dear old man, and whether he is a cripple still, and how Dr. Hervey consoles him for my absence. And have you brought the book of glees I told them to send by you? Mrs. Dormer, I have made a discovery. Colonel Halkett has really a charming voice; but Mrs. Bartelotte's passion for poker has demoralized him to such an extent that anything so innocent as music has no attraction for him."

"Well," said Mrs. Bartelotte with a grimace, "I call that rough upon my morals, considering that it was Colonel Halkett who first persuaded me into gambling at Monte Carlo. I have been a hardened woman ever since."

Dr. Bramwell's heart bounded as he followed Miss Senguin to the greenhouse, but their *tête-à-tête* hardly answered to his expectations. She chattered incessantly the whole time they were together, but upon indifferent sub-

jects, interlarding her inquiries about Alston matters with amusing anecdotes of Mrs. Bartelotte, Deodatus Lumley, and others of the Croxham visitors. He marvelled within himself at the transformation her spirits had undergone; but, true to his compact, refrained from any allusions which might render their talk dangerously personal. He was vaguely disquieted by the air of coquetry that he now perceived in her. To his mind she was more lovable in her impulsive, self-upbraiding moods. But never had she appeared more beautiful; every motion was instinct with grace; her dress, even to the most minute detail, was studied; her lips parted almost languorously; her eyes by turns melted with tenderness and sparkled with vivacity; her expression was never for two minutes alike, yet all the while she presented the same vivid and harmonious identity. She bewitched him to a greater degree, yet not quite in her former fashion. The fascination was more unwholesome; it excited him and yet deepened his melancholy.

When they returned to the house it was found that most of the party had adjourned to the billiard-room. Dr. Bramwell felt himself out of place in the atmosphere of gaiety and badinage. Nadine threw herself with animation into some bantering talk, to which he did not possess the key, and he betook himself to Mrs. Dormer, who did not add to his happiness by her free and unsuspecting relation of Miss Senguin's triumphs. Mrs. Dormer was a woman of fashion, far removed from prudishness, who took life as she found it, and was too cynical, possibly too deep of nature, to be vain. It amused her to chaperone a new beauty, and she had a curiosity to observe how Nadine would deal with the ball that lay at her feet.

Dr. Bramwell's vague feeling of dissatisfaction did not decrease during the evening, and he had still the sensation of being out of the swing of proceedings. Nadine descended, lovely in black velvet, with tea roses at her breast, and was soon the object of universal attention. Dr. Bramwell's consolation, that

she had given him the bud which he wore in his button-hole, was counteracted when he perceived that Colonel Halkett was similarly decorated ; but he again derived comfort from the recollection of Mr. Senguin's story. The man whose mad wife was still living could not be Nadine's suitor.

He had hoped that it might fall to his lot to take Miss Senguin in to dinner, but fate, or Mrs. Dormer, had ordained otherwise. She was given to a stripling lord, one of the country neighbours ; and to Dr. Bramwell was awarded Miss Curtis, who, handsome and stolid, principally confined herself to the discussion of an elaborate repast.

Upon his other side was a travelled, rather blue, old-young lady, whose proclivities were literary and artistic, and who dabbled in shallow science, but who, fearful of committing herself, did not venture beyond safe generalities. She had read an article in one of the magazines upon Dr. Bramwell's theories concerning nerve function and nerve organization ; and though retaining but a misty

notion of his special claim to honour, was alive to the advantages of acquaintanceship with a man likely to become famous. Miss Beauchamp had a great deal to say upon most subjects, and attacked Dr. Bramwell from various points, but without striking success. Sara Bernhardt and the French plays; the private view at Burlington House; modern literature; M. Pasteur's discoveries; and finally, *à propos* of Caro and *Le monde ou l'on s'ennuie*, prettily dressed latter-day philosophy,—all fell flat. Dr. Bramwell, catching sight of Nadine some little way down the table, her fine face shadowed by a drooping frond of fern, her eyes fixed intently upon him in a gaze half-melancholy, half-beseeching, listened inattentively to the remarks of his erudite neighbour.

“People talk of Germany as the home of scepticism, but we English outrun the Germans in our materialism. Germans cannot be rationalists; they are essentially theists; none have ever denied the existence of the soul. Have you studied Descartes, Dr. Bramwell?”

Dr. Bramwell answered at random, hitting the mark.

"Are you alluding to French or German philosophy?"

"Gracious!" exclaimed Mrs. Bartelotte across the table. "I shall never ask you to come and see me in London, Dr. Bramwell, if that is the kind of light conversation you indulge in. I'm as ignorant as a typical country woman whom I met at Nice; she thought Tauchnitz a very good author, but was surprised that the foreign libraries had so many of his works."

"Ah!" sighed Miss Curtis, who had caught only the word Nice, "we used to breakfast sometimes at the Réserve. The *bouillabaisse* is so excellent."

Miss Senguin smiled from the distance in a manner that implied intimate understanding. A warm glow suffused Dr. Bramwell's soul, which had been cold and hungry for some definite sign of her regard. He plunged into a wild dissertation upon the Cartesian system. This had at least the happy effect of alarming

his philosophical interlocutor, and she was glad to withdraw from these deep waters to the comparative shallows of Wagnerian music.

Dr. Bramwell determined to seek Nadine later, and at all hazards to try and draw her into confidential talk. But alas for his chances of private conference with this enigmatic lady whom he loved! After dinner his host, full of kindly but misplaced interest, led him aside to ask innumerable questions about the London life which he intended to embrace. Did not Croxham feel justifiable pride in its doctor who had already achieved celebrity? And when Dr. Bramwell was able to escape from Mr. Dormer he found that Miss Senguin had seated herself at the card-table, and was banking with Colonel Halkett.

CHAPTER III.

THE HISSING OF SERPENTS.

It is a pleasant sensation to be seated on a well-appointed drag, beside one of the best whips in England, and behind a team of spanking horses which you are certain will not be eclipsed by any in the coaching enclosure. Nadine Senguin, abstract and emotional as she sometimes appeared, was by no means insusceptible to these material considerations. Contrary to Mr. Deodatus Lumley's vaticinations, there was no east wind, she was *not* beside the wrong person, and in all the consciousness of beauty enhanced by a becoming toilette, she felt herself in excellent spirits. Apart too from any peculiarly private feelings, there was a scarcely-defined sense of gratification in the reflection

that her charioteer, Colonel Halkett, to whom Mr. Dormer had yielded the reins, was a man of fashion, whose attentions might almost be considered the hall-mark of social success.

The seat of honour had by common consent been allotted to Miss Senguin. She was to be the new 'beauty,' and had already begun to taste some of the sweets which that distinction confers. The elder married ladies, with their appointed squires, had preferred going comfortably by train to the long drive and chance of taking cold; and Mrs. Bartelotte, determined on no account to desert Mr Ormthwaite, whose education she had taken in hand, and whom she had resolved to inspire with a taste for dissipation more piquant than fox-hunting, sat with that gentleman behind; the other seats were filled by the younger and more spirited of the guests at Croxham, including, though he could hardly be classed with them, Dr. Bramwell.

He, placed to the left of Mrs. Bartelotte, had ample opportunity for observing the demeanour of Miss Senguin, and could not

avoid hearing scraps of the conversation which she carried on with Colonel Halkett.

It was frivolous enough, certainly not of a kind to arouse jealousy; but it seemed to Bramwell that the voices of both rang artificially, and their talk was emphasized by gestures implying a certain nameless familiarity, and by quickly averted glances charged with some subtle current of thought which he could not divine, but which set his brain working in conjecture, hateful to himself, and degrading to the goddess who still sat enthroned in his imagination.

Yet in spite of the smiling radiance of Nadine's face, it wore an expression more in harmony with this vein of thought than with the mental vision of her which Bramwell cherished. Can change of feature be wrought in a week? Could it be possible that the lips had shaped themselves into fuller curves, and that the eyelids had acquired a trick of voluptuous drooping and of sudden, coquettish uplifting of fringed lashes? Surely this was not the girl who had played Schumann to

him in the Alston drawing-room so short a time ago! Dreams! Were all his hopes baseless? and did Nadine's purity of mind and grace of character exist only in his fancy?

No, a thousand times! Not for an instant would he admit the bare suggestion.

Chollerton, though comparatively a small race meeting, is one of the most popular in England. Upon this occasion, royalty was represented; the great houses in the neighbourhood had sent forth large parties, and many well-known London faces smiled from the grand stand and from the tops of the drags in the four-in-hand enclosure. Hundreds of opera-glasses were levelled at the dark green coach, with its well-dressed freight and team of handsome bays, and whispers of admiration ran down the row as Colonel Halkett swept smoothly in at the opening and took up his position in line with the rest.

To court the gaze of a thousand eyes is part of the programme of a race day. To simulate enjoyment, if not to experience it, a

social necessity. Kill-joy faces are an insult to the pleasure-seekers, who, not having yet lost their money, ready to skim the cream of sport and pleasure, and anticipating a profitable if brief future of agreeable possibilities, are as fresh as the ladies' toilettes and the jockeys' colours.

But Bramwell in nowise fulfilled these conditions. It is one of the misfortunes of a doctor's profession that in it he is trained to peer below the surface of life, and that in whatever situation he finds himself, the earnest student must be oppressed by a sense of incongruity and of want of harmony between the frothy exterior and the human interests and passions that surge below. This feeling was intensified tenfold in Dr. Bramwell to-day. The garish display, the forced laughter, the artificial excitement, the element of coarseness and sensuality, which if not disagreeably obtruded in the fashionable crowd, was painfully manifest in the mob pressing against the enclosure, awakened in him a keen sensation of disgust. Were those

painted gaudy creatures, whose trade was written upon their faces, of the same mould as Nadine? It seemed to him desecration of his ideal that she should, as was apparent, lend herself heart and soul to the spirit of such a scene as this.

The party divided. Some joined Mrs. Dormer in the grand stand; others remained on the drag to watch the horses being led out for the first race. Nadine, her face flushed and eager, surveyed the course from her position of vantage in front, while Colonel Halkett held her parasol and adjusted the focus of her field-glass.

In her excitement she placed her hand upon his arm; their faces were close together.

Bramwell could not then account for the repulsion which their attitude aroused in his mind. He leaned forward and asked if she would accompany him to the saddling paddock.

Colonel Halkett shot at him a brief, bright glance, and bit the end of his tawny moustache. For a second Nadine appeared to hesitate, then said with a light laugh—

“Not now. At this moment my thoughts are concentrated on cold chicken and champagne. Later on, Dr. Bramwell, you may take me to the paddock; and in the meantime, if you want to earn my eternal gratitude, go across to the Stand and remind Mrs. Dormer, when the race is over, that there are hungry souls here dying for luncheon. Colonel Halkett, the race after this one is for the Cup, isn't it? I am glad that we shall be well-fortified before it comes off. I stand to win or lose six dozen pairs of Swedish kid gloves on Miss Mary; and you?”

Colonel Halkett laughed a little unsteadily.

“More than I like to think of before luncheon, Miss Senguin;” and then, bending towards her, he whispered something in a low tone, at which her face became set and white, and she glanced round uneasily.

But Dr. Bramwell had left the drag and was on his way to the Stand. There Mrs. Dormer, smiling but inaccessible, was exchanging greetings with London friends.

The place seemed all a flutter of feminine drapery and a buzz of chatter. Pretty women fingered dainty *lorgnettes* and toyed with lace parasols; goddesses in nineteenth-century attire displayed a mundane eagerness over their betting-books; frisky matrons despatched their admirers upon excursions to the ring; and portly dames interchanged county civilities with bored-looking squires; while men of all types passed to and fro, blocking up the narrow gangway. One of these—muscular, fresh-complexioned, with something of the sporting cut in his attire—accosted Bramwell as the latter was steering circumspectly towards his destination.

“Why, Julian, old fellow! Is it you? What ages since we met! This puts me in mind of the old days at Cambridge, when you were a front rank man with the Fitz-William, and a successful performer at Cottenham. I fancied that you had eschewed athletics, sport, fashion, and all the rest of it, to become a medical great gun. I read a paragraph about you in one of the papers

the other day—madness, hydrophobia, or something equally horrible and incurable, traced to insects . . . Everything is traced to insects now-a-days. Mortality in grouse, agricultural depression, consumption, and Egyptian difficulties. Where are you staying?”

“With the Dormers at Croxham.”

“In the same house with that pretty Miss Senguin, of the queer Russian name, about whom every one is talking, and who is flirting so outrageously with Halkett! I envy you your opportunities of studying the colour of her eyes. I have a bet with Yorke on the subject. He says they’re grey; I back them for green. You can’t help me, I suppose? I shall put the case to Harry Dormer, and get him to introduce me.”

Disgusted and sore, Dr. Bramwell pressed on; but the crowd thickened, and presently he came to a standstill beside the first row of chairs. A striking-looking lady, one of the freest and fastest of the fashionable set of married women, stood with her profile

towards him, talking in perfectly audible tones to a gentleman upon her left.

"You know the ins and outs of Colonel Jack's little affairs," she was saying. "I have been hearing all kinds of naughty things about him lately. They say that he made desperate love in the winter to that pretty Miss Senguin, who is beside him on Harry Dormer's drag opposite. Clem Bartelotte, who went about with them a good deal, was the first to tell her that horrid story of Mrs. Jack and the madhouse. Really, there should be a law allowing men to divorce insane wives. Clem said—you know her quaint way—'Well, I should say it *was* just a crusher; but that was not my business. My dear woman! romance and high falutin' arn't in my line; they take a deal too much out of the nervous system; but I guess there was a pretty powerful eruption in that quarter. *She* kept her room for a week, and *he* went off all of a sudden to Paris.' That's the way of the world," added the lady. "Women when they are hard hit send for their doctor, and

men—go to Paris. But this is a lame conclusion to the tragedy. There they are, apparently excellent friends, with what seems to be a remarkably tasty luncheon spread out behind them; and I'm bound to say that neither hero or heroine give one the idea of being victims to hopeless passion. How has Colonel Jack settled matters?"

"Oh, Halkett has a genius for Platonism."

The lady laughed.

"Platonism answers admirably with married women, but it don't do in the case of pretty young ladies. Colonel Halkett is wise in his generation. He will teach Miss Senguin nineteenth century morality; and seeing that he cannot keep her for himself, will magnanimously hand her over to an unexceptionable *parti*."

"With all rights reserved! Look, here come the horses; and Potboy is nowhere. You are in for a pony, Lady Alsager."

Dr. Bramwell moved away, borne on by the crush downwards to the course. The shouting of the crowd, the yells of the

bookmakers, the buzz of exclamation, the *frou-frou* of silk in the Stand, all mingled confusedly in his ears like the roar of distant thunder. His brain whirled. Escaping from the throng of well-dressed people, he wandered aimlessly among the motley mob outside the ropes, past spangled dancing-girls, clowns, tumblers, sword-swallowers, booths placarded with announcements of 'Bodiless ladies,' 'Mammoth children,' 'Wonders of the World,' besieged every now and then by hoarse entreaties that he would buy, a donkey that swallowed pence, a rosebud for his sweetheart, a pure-bred Skye terrier, a box of lucifers, "for the love of God, and to save a penniless widow and children from starvation"—sickening sights and sounds that chimed in a horrible incongruous fashion with the ghastly misgivings that rose in his mind. His former vague doubts assumed shape now, and appeared to mock at him like gibbering fiends. A lurid light seemed thrown upon his mental image of Nadine. Her wild words, conflicting impulses, wayward moods, and

occasional fixed look of misery, might be interpreted by the key of passionate, unavailing desire. . . . Yet, was it conceivable that tragic yearning could mask itself beneath a demeanour at times so frivolous? If Lady Alsager's story were true,—Bramwell shuddered at the thought of his darling's name the subject of shameful innuendo and vulgar gossip,—he marvelled at the self-command which enabled Nadine to support such agony as, under the circumstances, this false-seeming intercourse at Croxham must imply; or had she fallen so thoroughly into the spirit of the age, that to enact the part of heroine in a nineteenth-century drama, involving the sacrifice of maidenly instinct, and the torture of her most sacred emotions, against such a background as now presented itself, cost her no more than a passing pang?

When Dr. Bramwell returned to the enclosure the ostentatious business of luncheon was in progress. Every drag had mounted its white table-cloth, upon which glass and

silver glittered, aspic jelly quivered, and lobsters and forced strawberries made brilliant spots of colour. Each repast seemed to vie with the other in a display of seasonable and unseasonable dainties. Champagne corks were flying, and there was a rattle of laughter and light talk. The Dormers' party had been reinforced from the Stand. Mrs. Bartelotte had discovered an old admirer, and was not sorry to have an opportunity of piquing Mr. Ormthwaite, who, she declared, was neglecting her shamefully, and whom she rallied unmercifully upon his preference for the saddling-paddock and the ring. Miss Curtis, her glass frequently replenished by the attentive diplomatist, was serenely enjoying her luncheon, and contributing but little to the general hilarity. Deodatus Lumley, Mr. Bartelotte, and Miss Beauchamp, the travelled young lady who owned a weakness for improving society, had secured a pigeon pie, a dish of cold cutlets, and a bottle of champagne between them, and were enlivening the more serious business of the collation

by a discussion upon Eastern mysticism. Colonel Halkett had withdrawn from Nadine's side, and was ministering to the wants of a London beauty, whom Harry Dormer had borne triumphantly across from the Stand, and two young guardsmen leaned over Miss Senguin, who consumed lobster salad with a satisfaction as placid as that evinced by the heiress.

Luncheon was barely over when the horses came out for the Cup race. As it was for two miles, Colonel Halkett suggested a walk to the starting-point. The party divided again. Nadine, piloted by Colonel Halkett, moved on ahead, and Mrs. Bartelotte fell, for the time being, to Dr. Bramwell. She called him to task for his moody manner, and requested that if he had any more new theories about diseases and such-like horrid matters, he would ponder them in his consulting-room, and not on a racecourse.

"I detest doctors," she remarked, with her usual frankness. "If you weren't so charming, upon occasions, and if every one didn't say you were going to be another Harvey or

Jenner, I should have nothing to say to you. But come now, I don't believe it's science that is absorbing you. You seem dreadfully out of sorts. If my husband looked as glum as you do I should just suspect that he had backed Potboy to a pretty considerable amount; and my deduction from that would be domestic squalls, and a row over my milliner's bill. But betting isn't your weakness. H'm, I know what is. Don't you think that I've lived all these years in the world for nothing! You should not let a married man run off with your young lady. There *is* a wife in the background, though, perhaps, you aren't aware of the fact. Few people are. Confess. Aren't you dying to be in Colonel Halkett's shoes at this present moment? "

"No," answered Bramwell, mastering himself with a great effort, "for if the state of his heart is what you suppose it to be, neither his position or his feelings can be at all enviable."

Mrs. Bartelotte shrugged her shoulders with pretty affectation.

"You look down from a pedestal upon the world in general. I thought that the impossibility of marriage was the crowning attraction of being in love. Anyhow, that's what erotic philosophers tell us. We treat our passions kindly in real life, Dr. Bramwell; it's only in novels that they are torn to tatters. But unless I'm greatly mistaken, Colonel Jack has other fish to fry to-day besides sentimental ones; and if Miss Mary does not run up to her form for the Cup he will go back to Croxham a sadder and a poorer man. I'm immensely curious about the result of this race from a psychological as well as a pecuniary point of view, though I know that you won't sympathize with me, for you have a sovereign contempt for everything that is interesting and uncanny."

"By no manner of means, Mrs. Bartelotte, for *you* are interesting, though I hope you are not uncanny."

Bramwell could have jeered at himself as he uttered the bald compliment.

"Well, I guess you are getting on," said

Mrs. Bartelotte approvingly. "At this rate, and by dint of practising on me, you'll be a match for Colonel Halkett himself. Now let me tell you, though I must say it sounds very silly, Mr. Ormthwaite has had a dream about the winner of the Cup, which he confided to me on the drag coming here. You wouldn't take him for a Joseph, would you? but it doesn't do to judge by appearances. He dreamed last night that the race was won by an outsider—out of the betting altogether—called Abatos."

They had reached the starting-place, and Colonel Halkett, who had caught Mrs. Bartelotte's last words, turned laughingly round.

"I wouldn't advise you to lay long odds against Miss Mary, Mrs. Bartelotte, on the strength of Jem Ormthwaite's prophetic vision. He was heard to declare last night that curried prawns invariably gave him the nightmare; and I can vouch for three brandies and sodas in the smoking-room. Allah is great, but Jem Ormthwaite is not his prophet.

Besides, there isn't a horse of that outlandish name on the card."

"Ah! that is just where the dream begins to fulfil itself," cried Mrs. Bartelotte excitedly. "Lord Alsager has found out on *excellent* authority—don't smile in that jeering way, it's one of the trainers—that Bevis, the last one down on the list, was so christened, and his name had to be changed because one of the grooms being called Abbott, the horse was always known as 'Abbott's 'oss.' There! what do you say to that? I've given all my friends the straight tip, and you might have profited by my warning, Colonel Halkett, and hedged an hour ago."

Colonel Halkett laughed again.

"You and I, Mrs. Bartelotte," he said, "have the true gambler's instinct. Don't be surprised to hear that I *have* staked my all on Abatos;" and Mrs. Bartelotte had presently to bear a considerable amount of chaff upon her development of Jem Ormthwaite's latent mystical capabilities.

The horses gathered in line; and after one

or two false starts, were fairly off, Miss Mary leading. Now, set in the rush back to the Stand. Colonel Halkett's excitement was evident, in spite of his efforts to conceal it; and Mrs. Bartelotte had her private reasons for anxiety. In the *mêlée* they found themselves in advance together. Nadine Senguin, who had lingered, cast a glance, half-inviting, half-appealing, towards Dr. Bramwell. He pressed through the thin stream till he reached her side. The wave rolled on. They two were left, practically alone.

CHAPTER IV.

BEVIS WINS.

"I DON'T want to see this race," exclaimed Nadine. "I hate racing. I hate crowds and excitement. The whole thing is sickening: it is a raree-show, where we are like puppets dressed up, each with a part to act; and we must smile and pretend to be happy when our hearts are aching with pain. . . . Did you listen to Mrs. Bartelotte's story about Mr. Ormthwaite's dream? I'm beginning to believe that Croxham is an uncanny place. Last night *I* had a horrible dream. I dreamed that I was the White Lady who haunts the long corridor, and that like her, I was doomed to perpetual unrest in expiation of some terrible crime that I had committed in the far past. On, on, up and down, pacing

for ever—always weighed down by this ghastly burden of secret sin! Ah me! Do you know what it is to wake at night and to feel ghostly hands clutching you, and to strive with soul and might to escape, and then to realize that you are alone—alone—and that the spectres are your own hideous fancies and evil desires? Dr. Bramwell,” she added in a quieter tone, “I suppose that there is a place near where you can buy drugs. I want you to get me something which will send me into a sound dreamless sleep—if only for one night.”

Her haggard looks—for her face seemed to have grown in a moment old and withered—and her excited words confirmed all Bramwell’s torturing suspicions. His eyes fixed themselves upon her in deep, despairing solicitude. He uttered a heavy groan.

“What is it?” she asked with sudden sweetness, bending towards him, and gently touching his arm. “I make you unhappy, and I do not want to do that. I am not worth troubling about. Don’t mind me; my nerves are overstrained.”

"You *do* care whether I am unhappy?" he asked brusquely.

"Yes, indeed I do; it distresses me. Your face is my conscience. It has made me hate myself—hate everything around me. At luncheon you seemed to me like the skeleton at the Egyptian feast."

"Oh, Nadine!" exclaimed Dr. Bramwell impulsively; "it would be kinder far if you told me that my feelings were nothing to you."

"I know that it would," she answered sadly, "but it would not be true. Have you not often told me that truth is the one good thing? I wish to be honest—*sometimes*. I am not indifferent to you; you affect me strongly."

They stood silent for several moments. Though her voice had been knell-like, and though his better judgment assured him that his anguish and love were poured forth to no purpose, a ray of hope entered his heart.

"I am glad," he said, "that you have given me this opportunity of speaking to you, for I have something serious to say."

"I hope that this does not imply an infringement of our compact," she replied, with grave coldness.

"No; it concerns you—" He paused.

"Well! what is it?" she asked defiantly. "I am listening. But I warn you that I am not in the same mood to-day as when we talked last—a fortnight ago."

"Do I not know it? Since then you have come under another influence, and as it gains strength mine wanes. Oh, Nadine!" he cried passionately, "at this moment, I would sacrifice all my hopes for the future to possess the power of reading your thoughts. But I think that I have found a clue to them——"

"Remember," she interrupted haughtily, "I have not given you permission to say *anything* to me."

"Miss Senguin, the only right of speech that I claim, is that of one to whom your good name is sacred."

"*My good name!*" she repeated in a low voice, and coloured all over.

He had never before seen so deep a blush ;
throat and ears were crimson.

“ Surely,” he continued, “ that is imperilled
by the marked attentions of a man who
cannot marry you ! ”

Nadine grew pale, slowly, as the grey tinge
creeps over snow after sunset.

“ What ? How—” she faltered. “ You
have not seen or heard anything since you
came to Croxham to—to give rise to such
thoughts ? ”

“ Not an hour and a half ago, I heard your
relations with Colonel Halkett, possible and
impossible, discussed in the Grand Stand by
Lady Alsager and one of Halkett’s brother
officers. It was said that you loved him,
that he had won your heart,—villain that he
is!—while you were unaware of the fact of
his marriage, that—but I cannot repeat the
slandrous insinuations.”

Nadine did not immediately reply, but
stood, with face downcast, meditatively raking
the ground with her parasol. Presently she
said, quite coldly—

"If you listen seriously to the gossip of Lady Alsager and her set you will believe a great deal that is totally untrue."

"Nevertheless," rejoined Bramwell hotly, "it is cruelly compromising to a beautiful and comparatively unprotected girl."

"I fancied," she said, with a swift glance at his face, "that *you* were one of the few righteous men who don't measure by the standard of conventionality, and who have the courage to affirm that white-washed vice is not morality."

"There are some things," said Bramwell, hesitatingly, "in which private and conventional judgment must be identical."

She coloured again. At this moment the horses, veins quivering, flanks streaming, flew past the second time. Four were almost in a cluster, two neck and neck. It was a fine race; riders bent almost double, every nerve on the stretch, hands tense, faces grim with anxiety. The roar of voices round the Stand became hoarser and more deafening; when above the confused tumult rose the shout,

"Bevis wins;" "The outsider has it." But in spite of Nadine's assertion that she did not wish to see the race, Bramwell perceived that her frame was trembling with suppressed excitement. She moved eagerly forward and leaned over the ropes; her face changed, her colour came and went, and her eyes followed the horses with an intensity of gaze that surprised and almost shocked him. When the race was over she heaved a deep sigh, as though some inward strain had been removed. A smothered ejaculation fell from her lips. To Bramwell it seemed like an exclamation of despair. But she recovered herself in a moment, and cried gaily,—

"Jem Ormthwaite is a true prophet. The race has been run; Miss Mary has come in second. There's a triumph for the superstitious. Dr. Bramwell, does not this convert even a hardened sceptic like you to a belief in occult forces? Happy are they who backed Abatos. Come, let us go back and congratulate the winners."

But Dr. Bramwell detained her by an appealing gesture.

"Nadine," he cried, "have you no word of comfort for me? I do not mean as regards my own hopes. Let them remain blighted and dead as though they had never blossomed. But *you*! Oh, it is your pain that makes my heart bleed. . . . To know that you are suffering, is anguish greater than I can bear. You are on dangerous ground; will you not fly from it? If Colonel Halkett has not the manliness to leave you, will you not release yourself?"

Nadine seemed deeply moved by his appeal; her eyes melted with tears, her lips trembled.

"Oh!" she began, and a sob choked her voice. . . . But a new mood seized her, and she shook herself free from emotion. "Release myself! From what? The chain of this degrading attachment?" she cried, and her tone was metallic in its hardness. "What right have you to suppose that I have any such unworthy feeling, if indeed it be unworthy to love a man whom Fate has placed beyond the pale of happy marriage. Dr. Bramwell, I

could not have believed that you would take this melodramatic view of a situation, commonplace enough. Must every girl whom Colonel Halkett honours or degrades by his attentions, bear the stigma of having yielded to unlawful passion? One half of society speaks evil of the other half, and one does not hear of tragic consequences. Girls of the period are taught early to bridle their affections. As Mrs. Bartolotte remarked the other day, 'Love resolves itself into a question of keeping a carriage.' And if Jack Halkett were free to-morrow, he is too poor and too extravagant to think of marrying—me. I have a strong vein of worldliness in my composition, and am inclined to philosophize on life; the first axioms of my creed are—nothing matters, nobody cares. Ah, I am ungrateful to say that; no one cares—except *you*, and you only make yourself unhappy by doing so. Try to dismiss all these fancies from your mind. I wish it to be at ease. . . . Is it so—now?"

Bramwell shook his head.

She looked at him, melancholy, anxiety,

and a certain repressed impatience blending in her expression.

"You know that I have a strong regard for you. It pains me deeply to think that you are troubled by false impressions about me."

"Oh, that I could believe them false! But your alternate fits of feverish gaiety and of strange depression, your vague admissions, the traces of mental tumult which I see so plainly on your face, all confirm them."

"And you call yourself a clever physician, and yet do not consider how easily a sensitive nervous system may be disordered by several wakeful nights, and the excitement of poker," rejoined Miss Senguin with a forced laugh. "I will not gamble this evening, Dr. Bramwell, but will play all your favourite music instead; it will, I hope, have a tranquillizing effect upon us both. Then you shall give me my dose of 'bottled happiness,' and to-morrow you will find me a different person."

"You are right," said Dr. Bramwell mournfully. "Where you are concerned I have no

insight, no knowledge. For you I am but a poor physician. You bewilder me. In your many moods the real *you* escapes from me. You are a mystery which my skill cannot enable me to unravel. Latterly I have become painfully conscious of this. You have made me distrust my own powers. And it is because I love you."

She stopped him with an imperative gesture.

"No, no more. Remember our compact. I do not think that you will ever know the real *me*; but the time *may* come, perhaps will come shortly, when you will regard me with horror. If so, reflect that the woman you love *now* is in *every respect* the same as her whom you will hate *then*—in no way better or worse. Possibly virtue and vice may then seem to you mere things of comparison."

She walked on abruptly, and hindered any comment on his part upon her ambiguous words by resolutely changing the subject to inquiries concerning his London practice and plans for the future.

The occupants of the drag were all in a state of excitement and self-gratulation. As Nadine and Dr. Bramwell approached, they were greeted by a volley of reproaches for having missed the race of the day. Miss Senguin received cheerful condolences for her heavy losses in gloves, and was advised to seek consolation in the good fortune of her friends. Mrs. Bartelotte appeared radiantly triumphant. Jem Ormthwaite and Colonel Halkett were the heroes of the hour: the former, looking somewhat sheepish, was chaffed without mercy, and implored to prophesy the winner of the coming Derby; while Colonel Halkett laughingly responded to the congratulations showered upon him when it was discovered that he had actually taken Mrs. Bartelotte's advice and had backed Sir Bevis, otherwise Abatos, to such an extent that his winnings effectually placed him beyond the reproach of poverty. Though half ashamed of his recklessness, he had exhibited an interest in Miss Mary, and had thus misled the clever little American lady.

Bramwell, standing aloof and taking no part in the general felicitations upon this extraordinary *coup*, observed a long hand-clasp and a lingering look exchanged between Colonel Halkett and Miss Senguin; but presently the former disappeared from the roof of the drag, and was no more seen till the horses were put to and the course was beginning to clear.

During the rest of the afternoon Nadine was subdued, almost melancholy, and when rallied upon her silence, could only bid her persecutors remember that she had not backed Sir Bevis. She seemed to show a wish to avoid Halkett, insisted upon Mrs. Bartelotte taking her seat in front, and placed herself beside Dr. Bramwell. Her manner to him during the drive home lost its tinge of defiance, and was gentle even to tenderness: her accents, as she conversed in the tentative abstract manner which was one of her charms, low and suggestive; her eyes full of soft gravity. This sweetness, all in harmony with the lengthening shadows, the balmy air, and

fragrance of the May-day, intoxicated Bramwell, reason notwithstanding, and thrilled him with dreamy happiness, which in turn changed to hungry longing and passionate pain.

For minutes after her hand had been released from his, when he helped her to descend from the drag, the impression of her touch lingered, and his blood tingled at the sense of imaginary contact. And her eyes when they parted seeming to beseech his pity and forbearance, stirred all his yearning, and renewed belief in her truth and the nobility of her nature.

She came down to dinner clothed in creamy white, which seemed typical of her purity, a bunch of narcissus blown as it were upon her bosom, her face pale, with wistful eyes and gracious lips, and her dusky hair making a shadowy background to the clear brow and delicately cut features. She was allotted to Bramwell, and her appealing look and whispered entreaty, "Don't expect me to be gay and amusing this evening," seemed to establish a new claim upon his tenderness. The

spell was intensified when, later on, she seated herself at the piano and played several of Heller's dreamiest *nuits blanches*, then wandered through one of Raff's symphonies, and finally, after two or three preluding chords of grand dissonance, broke into Chopin's Marche Funèbre.

The stately measure filled the room and stilled the murmur of conversation. Nadine's eyes dilated, her small head was bent slightly backwards, her lips were parted, all her face seemed instinct with the harmony she was creating; Mrs. Bartelotte's nasal laugh sounding from the hall, where she sat commenting upon the events of the day, was the only jarring sound in the room. Colonel Halkett, to whom she had been talking, abruptly quitted her, and stood, a handsome figure, against the slightly drawn *portière*, his eyes intently fixed upon Miss Senguin. She glanced towards him; then her head drooped; she finished the march, hesitated a moment, and when all expected her to rise, struck the notes of a rippling accompaniment, lilting in

measure, but pitched in a minor key, so that all through it ran a strain of sadness, and sang in a manner plaintive yet arch, this little ballad of Edgar Allan Poe's, which she had once set to music.

"Gaily bedight,
A gallant knight,
In sunshine and in shadow,
Had journeyed long,
Singing a song,
In search of El Dorado.

"But he grew old,
This knight so bold,
And o'er his heart a shadow
Fell, as he found
No spot of ground
That looked like El Dorado.

"And as his strength
Failed him, at length
He met a pilgrim shadow.
'Shadow,' said he,
'Where can it be,
This land of El Dorado?'

"'Over the mountains
Of the moon,
Down the Valley of the Shadow,
Ride, boldly ride,'
The Shade replied,
'If you seek for El Dorado.'"

The last verse was given forth in a manner at once playful, defiant, and despairing. A moment's silence greeted its conclusion; then followed a low murmur of applause. Nadine left the piano, and presently the party began to disperse. It was getting late; no one had shown any inclination for the usual after-dinner diversions; the card-tables were deserted. The gentlemen had mostly broken up into knots; a cheerful clicking of balls sounded from the billiard-room. The elder ladies had retired, pleading fatigue; only a small party of congenial spirits remained, gathered now round the dying embers in the hall, and moved partly by Nadine's fanciful music, partly by some subtle sympathy—some indefinable current of thought which at times connects minds the most dissimilar—fell into fugitive, informal talk, touching subjects often shrunk from in mere commonplace discussion.

Nadine, followed by Bramwell, joined the group, which already included Colonel Halkett, and seated herself in a large, carved arm-chair a little apart from the rest.

A rose-shaded crystal globe shed a subdued light upon the scene, and, after the manner of half-illumination, brought into relief upon the oak carving above the fireplace, grotesque heads and curious tracery, and showed upon the tapestry quaint mediæval figures—warriors in ill-jointed armour, mounted upon lean steeds of sickly colours, and ladies in ruffs and farthingales, contrasting strangely with the bright faces and modern toilettes to which they formed the background.

BOOK III.

CHAPTER I.

THE BORDER-LAND OF THE INVISIBLE.

MRS. BARTELOTTE, who had been admiringly contemplating the tips of her daintily shod feet and the bugles which ornamented her dress, looked up suddenly, and gave a little shiver.

“Did you ever read a story of Hans Anderson’s,” she remarked, “in which the dream-shadows chase each other on the wall, and invite the thoughts of the lords and ladies? I always considered that a real practical idea. Why shouldn’t dreaming be cultivated as a science? Dr. Bramwell, there’s something for a clever man like you to think about. Well, I must say that I hope somebody will

be prophetically inspired to-night, for at this rate I shall soon pay off all my dressmaker's bills. Mr. Dormer, I must really beg you to take care that our Joseph is not exposed this evening to coarse and antagonistic influences. I've always understood that there was a great deal in influence. I'm sure that I've been doing my best to elevate his soul; and I must say that I don't consider billiards and brandies and sodas, and the sort of conversation that goes on in the smoking-room after *we* are in bed, at all stimulating to the spiritual faculties. Oh, we are all becoming quite mystical. Here's Colonel Halkett, who has been holding forth about elective affinities, moral magnetism, mysterious sympathies, *clairvoyance*, and all the rest of it, till I have begun to feel quite *squirmy*. I guess it's something in the air of the house, Mr. Dormer; and if Mr. Ormthwaite, or any one else, names the winner of the Stakes to-morrow morning, I think that the least we can do is to tender a vote of thanks to the Croxham ghosts. Now, would it be putting an insult upon

your great great grandmother, if we were to call her up from the vasty deep—or rather, down from the corridor, and ask her help in regulating our betting-books?”

“I shouldn’t advise you to trifle with the White Lady, Mrs. Bartelotte,” replied the host, with an air of gravity. “Do you know the legend? It is said that the lover of a certain Lady of Croxham was once foully murdered in her presence, in one of the chambers of the west wing. Since then, the story goes, whenever a guest dies at Croxham—an event, as you may imagine, of rare occurrence—footsteps and strange muffled sounds are heard in the corridor, and the phantom figure of a woman in white is seen to move slowly, and as if with difficulty, dragging behind her a shadowy, vaguely-defined form, supposed to be the body of a man. She pauses for an instant at the door of the doomed person, knocks, and disappears.”

“Oh my!” cried Mrs. Bartelotte. “I reckon we’ll let that ghost of your great great grandmother alone, Mr. Dormer. And,

by the way, I hope none of us are going to leave our bones at Croxham. I woke up last night, or rather this morning, between three and four o'clock, and I am certain that I heard stealthy footsteps in the corridor. I should have got up to look if I hadn't been so sleepy. See how you have frightened Miss Senguin; she is as white as though she were going to faint."

Every glance turned towards Nadine. She was leaning forward, her eyes dilated, her lips parted in an unconscious expression of fear, her face ghastly pale. Regaining composure with an evident effort, she said—

"It is nothing. I have got into the habit of sleeping badly, and such stories take hold of my nerves."

"Talking of haunted houses," said Colonel Halkett, breaking abruptly into the circle round the fire. "Have you heard the latest solution of the Carnwarth Castle mystery? It is ingenious, if nothing else. They say that several hundreds of years ago, the wife of an Earl of Carnwarth, a lady of evil repute,

popularly described as the Witch of Fife, gave birth to a monstrosity—half-toad, half-man. The longevity of the toad species is a matter of natural history. This creature, protected by the spells of his mother, the most malevolent spirit in the Castle, is the occupant of the mysterious chamber, and the rightful Earl of Carnwarth.”

In the buzz of comment with which Colonel Halkett's story was received, the impression made upon Nadine by the Legend of the White Lady of Croxham was forgotten, and conversation drifted towards the subjects of apparitions, of dual existence, hallucinations, and kindred topics.

The late Lord Lytton was quoted as an exponent of the theory of AWE, and almost each member of the party had some history to relate of individual excursion into the fields of mysticism. Dr. Bramwell was assailed as a sceptic in all that appertains to the occult and transcendental. Nadine Senguin's eyes seemed to implore him to divert the current of talk from the personal channel in which it now flowed.

"Surely," said Mrs. Dormer, "you must admit the reality of certain psychological experiences common to many of us, which cannot be explained by natural law."

"Ah!" said Dr. Bramwell, smiling, "the materialist is popularly accused of arrogance and narrow-mindedness, but, in fact, quite the contrary is the case. It is the supernaturalist who limits his belief in the operations of nature by the evidence of his own senses, and compelled to supply deficiencies, presupposes the existence of arbitrary spiritual agencies, with which reason must be more or less at variance. To the scientist who regards natural law as a continuous and ever more complex chain of cause and effect, of condition and result, the explanation of psychological phenomena by the working of physical forces, appears no more impossible and no less wonderful than the promulgation of disease by the action of germs, or the confinement of mind in grey matter."

"What is matter? Never mind. What is

mind? No matter," parenthetically observed Mr. Deodatus Lumley.

"Oh dear!" sighed Mrs. Bartelotte. "Since we are all agreed that everything is a mystery, where's the use of arguing about it? But I must tell you that I have a very poor opinion of your philosophy, Dr. Bramwell, and I think you deserve to encounter a specially malevolent ghost as a punishment for your unbelief."

"At any rate," added Mr. Dormer, "we will not be so cruel as to hope that the White Lady may pay him a visit to-night in order that he may have proof positive of the spirit world."

"I think," said Mrs. Dormer, thoughtfully, "that many curious things might be accounted for on the supposition that there is a kind of moral electricity which pervades nature and life, and under certain conditions brings people into unconscious *rapport* with each other. We know how the nerves may vibrate like the strings of a sensitive instrument, and the mind be filled with strange fugitive fancies, unreal, yet vivid impressions, by

some indefinable outward agency; the sighing of a south wind, the scent of a flower, the refrain of a song. We know the subtle sympathy which before receiving a letter from one with whom our soul has been in communion, causes us to be haunted, waking and dreaming by thoughts and images of that person. . . . This was at one time a common experience with me. . . .”

Mrs. Dormer sighed involuntarily, and a vaguely embarrassing consciousness fell upon the group. It was known to one or two intimate friends, and suspected by others, that the force of her nature had expended itself in a strong intellectual attachment to a gentleman of rare attainments, who had died some few years before.

“I will tell you something which partly illustrates what I mean,” Mrs. Dormer added, hurriedly. “As this experience is my own, you may take it honestly for what it is worth. The oddest point in it, is its total absence of point.” She laughed and continued—

“You know how fond my husband is of

running up to London for the day, leaving his dog-cart at Brayshill, and driving himself home, so that he is not tied by any particular arrangement. Upon the occasion to which I am referring, he went up on a day when we were expecting friends to dine and sleep, and without having inquired his plans, I had taken it for granted that he would return by the train which brought them. An hour or so before the time at which I supposed he would arrive I was sitting at my boudoir window,—you will remember that it overlooks the back entrance,—when, glancing suddenly down, I saw Harry in the dog-cart drive round by the sweep which leads into the stable-yard and disappear within the gates. As he turned, he looked up, and laughingly shook his whip at me, while I nodded and waved my hand in return, then went on with my work; concluding, as he did not come upstairs, that he had been detained in conversation with the coachman, or had gone straight to his own study.

But when on the arrival of our guests he

did not appear, and when on inquiring I found that he had not been seen, and that there was neither horse nor dog-cart in the stable, I began to feel alarmed, though I tried to hide my anxiety, and after waiting dinner for half an hour, ordered it to be served without my husband. Just as we had finished the dog-cart *did* drive up, and Harry rushed in, full of apologies, and rather hesitatingly explained the cause of his late arrival.

“‘I fully intended to come down by the train before yours,’ he said to one of our guests, ‘and am ashamed to confess that, having a few minutes to spare at Clapham, I went into the waiting-room and fell fast asleep on one of the settees. The extraordinary thing is, that when I awoke I could not at first divest myself of the notion that I was lying on my own sofa in the smoking-room, for I had the most singularly vivid impression of having accomplished the journey, remembering the minutest detail, even to the fact of driving in at my back gate, and of

seeing my wife at her boudoir window, shaking my whip at her, and receiving a nod and a wave of the hand in return."

"Now," concluded Mrs. Dormer, "if anything had happened to Harry that evening the occurrence would have been considered a supernatural warning. As it is, the whole thing is motiveless, inexplicable—the fact of an apparition without its *raison d'être*."

Just then several of the billiard-players entered, and the conversation was momentarily diverted. Miss Senguin rose abruptly and addressed her hostess.

"Our talk has been extremely eerie, and I am afraid that I shall not sleep if I listen to any more like it. Good night, dear," in a half whisper; "I don't think that I am up to 'curling paper' confidences. Mrs. Bartelotte, I hope the ghosts won't revenge themselves upon us for discussing them so lightly by whispering the name of the wrong horse in Mr. Ormthwaite's ear. Colonel Halkett, I wish you happy dreams of your

good fortune. You at least have found El Dorado to-day."

As she spoke, pausing opposite him, whether by accident or design, the bunch of narcissus that she wore fell at Colonel Halkett's feet. A look was interchanged between them. Bramwell, as he held back the heavy curtain which partly veiled the staircase, observed the glance, and his heart contracted with a spasm of pain. He gave Nadine her candle and let the curtain fall behind them.

"Have you got me my flacon of bliss?" she asked, offering him her hand.

"I have given it to your maid," he replied gravely; and added, not without a tinge of bitterness in his tone, "I hope that you will sleep well, and awaken in a more happy mood."

She gave him a look in which anger and defiance seemed to mingle.

"Oh, Nadine!" murmured Bramwell; but she shook her head with a peremptory gesture, and without another word ascended the staircase, and passed into the long corridor

upon which most of the bed-rooms opened. Racked by pain and perplexity, he watched the last flutter of her white dress, then turned to encounter the rest of the party filing out from the inner hall, Mrs. Bartelotte in advance discoursing volubly, and Colonel Halkett lingering to give some directions to the butler about being called a little earlier than usual, as he had some important letters to write before breakfast.

CHAPTER II.

THE PHANTOM IN THE CORRIDOR.

It was one o'clock when the men began to leave the smoking-room, half-past one before all sounds were hushed in the house, and Bramwell, released by his host, found himself alone in his chamber.

The potion which he had been at some pains to procure for Miss Senguin, he might with advantage have administered to himself, for never had he felt more restless or disinclined for repose. He threw himself in a large arm-chair, and remained for some time lost in bitter and fruitless reverie, his mind working in vivid images of Nadine, which presented her by turns alluring and repellent, candid and inscrutable, and that tortured while they excited him to keener longing.

Hours passed. The stillness of the chamber was palpable, oppressive; yet there was tumult in Bramwell's soul. Hungry passion stirred in him; it was like a life within his own; it beset him; he could not be tranquil. Now he opened the window and gazed outward. A bank of ebon clouds lay heavy in the west. The wind had risen, and moaned sullenly, seeming to herald a gale. Masses of murky vapour veiled the heavens; every now and then, the moon severed them, and broke forth, a clear, full orb, gleaming pale, and imparting an unearthly radiance to the swaying beeches and stretch of lawn, and to the grey stone walls of the wings that rose on either side of the central building where Bramwell stood. Momentarily, almost, the pallid light illuminated the scene, then all was blackness, sable folds closed; balustrade, parterre, and silvery streak of ornamental water vanished in the night.

The clock in the turret struck half-past three.

Whence came this troubled sense of

~~thought~~ and of strange, anxious expectancy, this readiness of impression and susceptibility of ideational and emotional response.

Bramwell felt himself to be in an abnormal condition of brain and perception, resembling what the recurrent fantasia and depression induced by certain stimulants—recognized the fact, yet was unable to assign it to any given cause save the tension of anxiety and loss of Nerve, and yielded himself with easily a struggle to the sensation of unreality, and of openness for any curious or psychological experience, which was stealing over him and subverting his materialism.

Minutes went on. The clock struck again—four distinct strokes each dropping slowly like a knell. The wind had grown fiercer, and rising in mournful swell and gusty violence, seemed the wail of approaching disaster. A deadly chilliness was borne upon the blast. Bramwell shivered and closed the window. As he did so a sudden gust extinguished the candles which had been

lighted upon his dressing-table. Save for a feeble glow shed by the dying fire, the room was in darkness.

He groped for matches, but uncertainly. The room appeared full of shadows. A fitful flame leaped up, and died, and leaped again. He paused. . . . Hark! Was that a sound in the corridor, or was it the wind, or was it his own fancy? . . .

The impression of unreality deepened. He might have been thinking, feeling, listening in a dream. *Was* he in a dream? Suddenly his being became merged in one of those transitory phases of consciousness to which many persons are liable, but which *he* had never known. Scene and condition of existence were *recognized*—instantaneously, *evanescently*—as an experience of the past. The dim room, the dusky drapery, the moan of the blast, almost drowning that other protracted roll which had caught his ear, the flickering flame, a streak of moonlight that fell through the aperture of an imperfectly closed shutter and defined in its milky track the pattern of carpet and

shape of chair, the fantastic tumult within his brain—all seemed to have sunk at some former time into memory, and to have revived now with the swiftness of lightning, bearing for the second during which the *intuition* lasted, a wondrous prevision and mysterious expectancy.

And still, as in a dream, he knew that the sound—heavy, halting, muffled, as of a massive substance dragged with difficulty along some dull and unresonant surface—advanced, proceeding down the corridor, and drawing nearer to the door of his room.

Then, not in the nature of inspiration, but as if the idea had been long familiar, and were incorporate with that weird state of consciousness, the legend of the Lady of Croxham took possession of his mind; and while underlying the illusive reality, there was an incongruous sense of possible deception or hallucination, and of the necessity for maintaining composure, Bramwell, his nerves quivering, waited and listened.

The noise deepened, becoming every instant

more distinct—a painful trailing, with at intervals, a pause or suggestion of spasmodic motion, as though progress were laborious; now silence; now the sound of accelerated speed, as hurried in a more intense access of energy, *IT* passed his room.

There was no ghostly signal.

At the moment, Bramwell knew not whether he himself opened the door of his Chamber, or whether what he saw were a vision, created by his quickened imagination, or the phantom of a dream in which he acted, unconscious that he slept.

Before him, at the distance of a few paces, there moved in the dimness, what appeared to be the slender, white-clad form of a woman. Her shoulders were shrouded in falling hair; her face was turned sideways, her figure bent in a semi-crouching posture; while her two white hands grasped a recumbent mass, the apparently lifeless body of a man, which she half dragged, half supported, in her struggling movement towards a dim barrier that rose before her in the shape

of a green baize partition dividing the long corridor and cutting off the rooms at the further end.

Here, the shape, corporeal or incorporeal, paused. It turned, straining wildly at its burden with a gesture of seeming despair, and Bramwell discerned a white featureless mask, and the contour of neck and uplifted chin.

The corridor was almost in darkness, every lamp extinguished, the shutters barred. One window only, had by freak or inadvertence been left unclosed, and was shrouded by a swaying curtain, through which the moon, in her fitful flashes, shed a pale glimmer. Suddenly, either the draught from the opened baize door or a sharper gust of wind blew aside the heavy drapery.

A silvery ray streamed full across the apparition, and bathed in pale phosphorescence a woman's face,—bloodless, the features transfixed by terror indescribable, the eyes wild and glassy, the lips parted,—and shone upon tense white arms and rigid fingers,

upon which was the glitter of diamonds—fingers that were contracted in an agony of effort, as by a strength almost superhuman the body was hurled through the opening.

There was a swift flash, and the clang of a fallen trinket rebounding from the wall; the door closed behind the figure; the curtain swung back; the corridor was again wrapped in gloom.

A nameless horror gripped Bramwell. . . . Those lips! those eyes! Was he mad? was he dreaming? or had he gazed upon the face of Nadine Senguin?

With a smothered ejaculation he darted forward; but in his bewilderment and in the darkness he struck his forehead sharply against the lintel of the doorway and staggered back, for the moment almost stunned by the blow. When he had reached the baize portal, and had flung it open, nothing but blank darkness was before him.

Had the shape, woman, or phantom, disappeared into one of the rooms beyond? He tried each door in succession: all were closely

fastened; no ray of light or sound of voice or movement betrayed human occupancy.

Dazed, shaken, distrustful of his very senses, Bramwell groped his way back towards his own room. As he passed the baize barrier, again the curtain was stirred, and for a second the moon shone through the opening and caught the gleam of a quaint, heart-shaped diamond ring that lay upon the carpet. Involuntarily Bramwell stooped and picked up the ornament. Without pausing to examine it, and in the confusion of his brain hardly connecting it with the vision he had witnessed, he thrust it into his breast, gained his chamber, and there, overcome by horrible and undefinable dread, he, the man of iron nerve, the materialist, the philosopher, sank back in a stupor of semi-unconsciousness.

CHAPTER III.

THE LEGEND FULFILLED.

ABOUT half-past eight the following morning Bramwell was awakened from the troubled sleep into which he had fallen by a hurried knocking at the door of his room, and started from his chair to confront Harry Dormer, who, with his usually cheerful countenance pale and ominously grave, rushed in, exclaiming in agitated tones,—

“Bramwell, get up! You are wanted immediately. Get up, man! What! you are dressed! You have not been in bed.”

Dormer scanned the haggard face, looking even more perturbed than his own, and the disordered figure, still apparelled in evening costume.

“Good God!’ he cried, “do you know anything of this terrible business?”

The room seemed to swim before Bramwell's eyes; he staggered, and his hand grasped nervously at the chair by his side. Simultaneously with Dormer's ejaculation, there rushed into his mind a clear recollection of the events of the preceding night, but whether as the remembrance of dream or of actual fact he could not tell. A hideous dread seized him icily; cold perspiration stood upon his brow. "What? . . . Who?" he stammered. But in a moment he had regained his habitual self-control, and answered composedly,—

"I know nothing. Last night I was restless and did not go to bed, but fell asleep while I sat thinking over the fire. Tell me at once what I can do. What has happened?"

"A death, the most sudden—shocking; it has utterly unnerved me. I don't know how I am to break the news to my wife. Not many minutes ago Halkett's servant came in to tell me that he had found his master lying stone dead in his bed. You can imagine the shock. I went into the room; it was all too true. You are the nearest doctor at hand.

I don't suppose there is the least hope ; but come quickly and examine the— See if anything can be done."

Wasting no further time in explanation, and signing to Bramwell to follow him, Dormer passed into the corridor and turned to the left towards the baize door, which now stood open, displaying a passage equal in length to that through which they were hurrying, and with rooms opening on to it on one side. Housemaids had already been at their morning's work. The curtains were discreetly folded back ; a flood of light poured through the open windows, and sunbeams danced upon the carpet. Bramwell gave an involuntary shudder as, walking now in the daylight to face a known horror, the vivid, fantastic impressions which had made the night terrible returned to him with the force of reality. He felt again that mysterious sense of prescience, heard the moaning of the wind, the muffled sound of dragging ; beheld the eerie flash of moonlight, the white clad shape and Medusa-stricken face, so like and yet so unlike that of Nadine ; saw the struggling

hands and strained arms as, with a strength surely transcending that of any frail girl, the ghastly burden had been drawn into the darkness beyond. Was this nightmare, or had the Lady of Croxham walked, in obedience to her doom, and delivered her supernatural warning?

Mr. Dormer turned the handle of a door not many paces beyond the baize barrier, and they entered the chamber—the only one occupied in that end of the corridor—which had been assigned to Colonel Halkett. There was in the room no appearance of disorder suggestive of violence or tragedy. The dead man's watch ticked upon the table beside a heap of notes, loose gold, and silver. A library novel lay half open, with a paper-cutter between its leaves. The curtains of the bed were drawn, the clothes folded smoothly; while the body lay in a natural position, with its head turned sideways upon the pillow, and except for a certain rigidity of feature and tenseness of nostril and eyelid, the face might have been that of one in peaceful sleep.

Dr. Bramwell felt the still pulse, and laid his hand upon the unbeating heart, then stepped back, saying gravely—

“There is nothing to be done; he is quite dead.”

Dormer turned away, struggling with an emotion of which the other showed no trace. Neither spoke for a minute or two. Strange thoughts stirred Bramwell as he stood in the dead presence of the man whom he had believed to be his rival. At last Dormer said,—

“I must break this to my wife and to—
Nadine Senguin.”

“It would be best,” said Dr. Bramwell, speaking in a voice which even to himself sounded hard and unnatural, “that Mrs. Dormer should send a note to Miss Senguin’s room, conveying to her gently the tidings of what has happened. The shock of public announcement would—might unnerve and distress one so sensitive and easily wrought upon.”

“You are thoughtful—and right,” answered Mr. Dormer. “She and the poor fellow were a great deal together. I sometimes fancied—

but every one knows what Jack Halkett was; and the story of his wretched marriage was common property. Mrs. Dormer is fond of saying that of all women in the world Nadine Senguin is the one most capable of amusing without compromising herself. Ah! that marriage was Halkett's undoing—the ruin of his life; never was there a more tender-hearted creature or better fitted for domestic happiness.”

Dormer turned away and began pacing the room, while Bramwell bent in silent examination of the dead body.

“What a man to be taken off so suddenly,” continued Dormer, his habitual flippant loquacity, which had been checked by the shock, again awakened, and taking the form of retrospect. “Good all round: a crack shot, the best whip in England bar one, and as straight a rider across country as ever followed hounds. I shall never forget him, on that raking bay of his, clearing the brook at Burswell's Bottom. We shall miss him in the field this season. And what a good fellow!

Men, women, and children all adored him. Heart disease, I conclude. Nobody suspected it; he, I am certain, least of all. Shall I leave you, Bramwell, or do you need any assistance?"

"No," answered Bramwell, "I would rather be alone."

"You will find me in my dressing-room. I suppose Jack's brother ought to be telegraphed for at once; and these people, or at any rate the strangers, must be got away. Good Lord! have you ever heard of such a melancholy conclusion to a racing party? and so jolly as we all were too! I've stopped the confounded servant's chatter. You remember our chaff last night about the White Lady? Curious coincidence, wasn't it? They've got a story afloat already that a woman's figure has been seen of late gliding along the corridor about daylight in the morning. It is a case of the carcass and the eagles. Where sudden death is, there the gossips gather together. I have a sad business before me. I must go to my wife; and then there's the clearing of the house. You'll stick to us,

Bramwell; I couldn't stand a night here by myself. I suppose that to-morrow there'll be the inquest. Doctor, you may think me shallow-hearted, but I declare that I'd give my right hand to have Jack Halkett alive among us again."

Dormer went away, and Bramwell was left alone. When his examination was over he proceeded to the dressing-room of his host to deliver his report. There was no doubt as to the manner of death. Colonel Halkett had been suffering from disease of the heart of long standing, which at any moment of undue excitement or exertion might have suddenly terminated life. The only ground for surprise lay in the fact that death had taken place during sleep, and not, as might have been anticipated, in immediate consequence of mental agitation or physical effort.

There was that morning something hushed and ominous in the atmosphere at Croxham. Blinds were drawn up-stairs. Servants talked low together, and scared faces haunted the corridor. By ten o'clock most of the guests

were aware that the most reckless spirit among them upon the previous day had but a few hours since, passed into the eternal silence. Conjecture was rife; vague whispers of suicide prevailed; mysterious rumours ran through the house. Maids had each a different tale to confide to their respective mistresses. Alarm and confusion reigned; and only Mrs. Dormer's pencilled request that all would assemble as usual in the breakfast room, prevented hurried departures, and a general uncertainty in the minds of every one as to whether presence or absence were most desirable.

Great as was the shock to Mrs. Dormer, for she had been fondly attached to Jack Halkett, she bore herself bravely; stifled her grief, and resolved that the exodus of her guests should be rendered as little trying as the unhappy circumstances would permit. Trouble on another score also assailed her mind. Her conscience, roused to activity by Harry Dormer's suggestive lamentations over the fate of his friend, accused her of having indulged a selfish, cynical curiosity

and thoughtless disregard of calamitous consequences, in her encouragement of the intimacy between Halkett and Nadine. She had credited the latter with considerable callousness and worldly wisdom, her easy belief being hardly warranted by her knowledge of the girl's character; and she now felt qualms of terror as to the effect which a sudden announcement of the late tragic occurrence might possibly produce upon Nadine. In an access of womanly tenderness, weeping, her heart soft with sympathy, Mrs. Dormer went herself to Nadine's room, nerved to meet reproaches and a display of the most heart-rending emotion. But the young girl greeted her friend calmly, and received her statement with an apparent frigidity which startled, but instead of deceiving, was a revelation to Mrs. Dormer. Nadine had by a supreme effort braced herself to the part; but she acted it too well. Her composure was unnatural. The marble quietude of her face, her dry, tearless eyes, the fixity of her look, her forced voice and

measured comments, betrayed too surely the pent-up anguish which her will held in such merciless restraint. Mrs. Dormer admired and wondered at her courage, pitying her from the depths of her heart; and yet she dared not show by word or sign that her woman's instinct had divined Nadine's secret. The girl's stoicism was a mask which might not be torn down, and at least it gave no justification for Mrs. Dormer's self-upbraiding.

That lady's tears fell freely. Nadine watched her, listening to the hysterical sobs, her own lips firmly set, the nails of her tightly-clutched fingers tearing her pretty palm, her eyes grim and defiant. But if they were dry, her heart was weeping blood. At last Mrs. Dormer roused herself and said falteringly,—

“Harry has telegraphed for Rupert Halkett. Most of these people will go away, but you, my dear, must remain of course, as we had arranged, till it is time to leave for London. Oh, I cannot bear to think of that now.”

“No,” answered Nadine, and her voice sounded to herself strangely far away; “I

shall return to Alston by the mid-day train. I have told my maid to make all necessary arrangements. She—I heard this first from her. I *must* go home; and you will be better without me here.”

“It is not a question of that, dearest, but of what you prefer.”

“I want to go home,” repeated Nadine, and looked straight at Mrs. Dormer, with wild eyes like those of a stricken animal seeming to urge dumbly—“Have pity. Do not *you* know the strain of silent endurance? Let me go away and be alone with my pain.”

Mrs. Dormer left the room, not imagining that Nadine would descend till she was equipped for departure; but to her surprise, when, pale and red-eyed, she took her own place behind the urn, Miss Senguin was already seated.

Dr. Bramwell, who had come down before the rest, watched Nadine’s entrance, his eyes fixed upon her with an intensity of which he was unconscious, but which was akin to the burning anxiety in his soul. She met his look, but it brought no flush to her cheek, no

answering consciousness to her eyes: they seemed to gaze through and beyond him. In truth, she had reached that pitch of effort at which the mind is abstracted from all outward things, and even sensation is almost null. Nadine heard confusedly the lachrymose murmur of conversation, but her own being was removed far above the flow of that babbling current. Automatically she moved to her chair, and sat like a statue, with head erectly poised and lips set tightly, while she toyed with her food and apparently lent her ear to Harry Dormer's disjointed and ungrammatical jeremiad upon the desolation which had come upon the house; to Mrs. Bartelotte's threnody, in which eulogium of the dead man's charms, foibles, and virtues mingled with naïve regrets that only his creditors and heirs would reap the benefit of his grand *coup* of yesterday; and to the platitudes and condolences which were being poured forth upon their hostess by the elder ladies of the party.

It seemed to Nadine that the greater number avoided speaking to her, and that

with regard to her presence, their manner exhibited an elaborate and scarcely disguised affectation of unconsciousness, while all, in reality, examined her critically. There was something grimly ludicrous in the situation that sustained her through an ordeal which not another woman present could have supported. Lax as were the morals of Croxham,—‘Flirt and let flirt’ being the motto of its *habitués*,—tongues had already begun to wag upon the subject of Colonel Halkett’s obvious devotion to Miss Senguin. More than one speculatively-inclined person had wondered whether she would ‘show up’ that morning, and if so, how far her demeanour would furnish a clue to her feelings; while the sentimental ones had derived consolation for the unhappy state of affairs by the expectation of an interesting drawing-room drama.

Mrs. Bartelotte, her radiance hardly dimmed by the black gown which she had donned and the lugubrious drawing down of her rosy lips, shot one glance across the table at Nadine, and then began to chatter, perhaps for the

first time, with a serious motive for her volubility.

"I reckon that Lacedæmonian boy is beaten any way," whispered the little American to her neighbour, Mr. Deodatus Lumley. "I will say for you Britishers, that you do carry off things on this side of the water in a way that's quite astonishing."

Mr. Lumley blinked his blue eyes and bent his sandy brows in abstracted contemplation of the beauty of stoicism. He too had his theories founded upon social observations and the study of chiromancy; but he was sympathetic, and pretended not to understand Mrs. Bartelotte's remark.

The meal was short and constrained, a mere sacrifice to conventional obligations, and an exemplification of the insular maxim—"Let everything be done decently and in order." The black shadow up-stairs seemed to have descended and to hover over the assembly. All were painfully conscious of the presence of death; all wished to escape as speedily as possible from the vicinity of that dread

spectre which stalks even amid scenes of gaiety. Some few were faintly aggrieved at having been cheated by untoward fate out of a day's sport or pleasure, but for the most part the guests at Croxham were too deeply awed to bestow any thoughts upon the Chollerton Races.

For Nadine each minute was a martyrdom. She made no sign; though a woman's heart be rent in twain, to utter a cry in public is to commit treason against her womanhood; but Bramwell, who still watched her, regardless of what might be said or thought of their relations,—full of deep, anxious solicitude for her in her pain, solicitude purely unselfish, and resembling rather that of a brother than a lover, too bewildered to be conscious of aught save of her and of that hideous, undefined suspicion which poisoned present and future,—saw that her coffee choked her, saw that her face was growing every instant more death-like, and knew that unless the strain were removed for a minute she must faint or shriek.

CHAPTER IV.

CROXHAM DESERTED.

At that moment, the arrival of the post-bag created a diversion, though Mrs. Dormer, in spite of her self-command, almost broke down at the sight of a packet of letters directed to Colonel Halkett—letters, the writers of which had little imagined would never meet the eyes of him to whom they were addressed. A move was made, and Nadine escaped up-stairs. Her fly had arrived and was waiting, piled with luggage. For her too, death seemed a pestilence to be shunned; or did she, like a wounded doe, yearn for solitude? Bramwell, longing passionately for one word, one look which might relieve the torturing anxiety by which he was racked, followed her unobserved, and saw her pass towards the west wing. In

a few moments she reappeared, clad in her travelling cloak, with her hat on and her veil down. She stopped for an instant in the corridor and cast one fearful look around, not seeing Bramwell, who stood against an abutting pillar at the head of the stairs. But for his presence the long passage was empty.

Nadine threw up her veil, and Bramwell saw her face unshadowed. Never had he beheld mental agony imprinted with such distinctness upon human countenance; but only for a moment: presently it had assumed again its grey, petrified look, and he could almost have doubted his own eyesight. She hurried towards the baize door, her head bent, her steps unfaltering, as though she were impelled onwards by a force outside herself. Having gained the partition, she hesitated. Her hand was outstretched, then withdrawn. Despairing resolve seemed to enter into her, and she turned deliberately back. It was the crowning act of her crucifixion of passion.

Bramwell advanced to meet her, in his

eagerness stretching forth his arms; but she swept swiftly past him, vouchsafing him not a look. Her veil was again lowered, but he could see that her white teeth pressed into her lips with a force sufficient to draw blood.

"Miss Senguin," he said, "may I speak to you a moment?" then added in a tone of sharp entreaty, "Nadine, I *must* speak to you."

She paused on the stairs till he had reached her side, then moved a step or two till they stood upon the half-way landing. Some one was ascending, and below in the hall was a knot of ladies conversing in whispers, their eyes directed upwards. Bramwell divined the instinct which had prompted her to evade him in the corridor. She feared self-betrayal. The dual nature was warring within her. She had called him her conscience. He felt with something like triumph, that to him, in wavering, inconsistency, or defiance, she *must* be true. There was comfort in the reflection. But the same subtle intention

bore conviction of her passionate attachment to Halkett and of the hopelessness of his own love. His thoughts and emotions rose and fell like the waves of a troubled sea, agonized certainty, succeeded by reactionary doubt. Yet it seemed to him that in this moment of mental renunciation he read her complex character more clearly than ever before. After the flash of comprehension came darkness; but it left irritated resolve. She might never be his; but suspicion, which perhaps wronged her, must either be confirmed or rooted from his mind.

"I have something that I must say to you," he said, his voice trembling with earnestness.

"This is not the time. I am on the point of going away. Do not delay me."

"Nadine," exclaimed Bramwell passionately, "you wish to evade me; but I will force you to listen to me. You have minutes to spare. And in the face of such a tragedy as this, of what consequence is it to you where you are or what you do, unless

indeed you could be alone? You know that if, instead of being taken to Alston, you were to-day conveyed to the Land's End, the relief to you would be intense. There you would be free from the observation of familiar eyes, and might relax the strain under which you have placed yourself. At home there will still be the necessity for sustaining your part. Have you considered that this cannot last? Sooner or later you must break down."

"What can I do? Ah me!" Her hands dropped helplessly. She was momentarily subdued by his firm tone of mastery. "I'm a brave woman. I can bear a sword-thrust without wincing; but—it's pulling out the weapon that's worst."

"Let me take you back to Alston," he pleaded. "At least I can watch over you, divert your father's attention from you—make your trial easier. You once vaguely promised me your confidence; give it to me now. You owe it me. I am tortured by the most hideous uncertainty. There is

a mystery which must be cleared up. For your own sake, even more than for mine, I implore you to be open with me."

Nadine drew herself up, her momentary weakness conquered. She answered unfalteringly, though she held her eyes averted—

"I forbid you to come to Alston, or to question me any further. Whatever your perplexities may be, you must solve them, or submit to them without appeal to me. There is no mystery, except in your imagination. I admit nothing except indeed that I am unhappy. You are too able a physician not to interpret the signs of pain. I can deceive others, I cannot deceive *you*. But my sorrow is not deeply rooted. I know myself far better than you know me. In a month it will have passed away. That I should suffer from this shock is natural, is it not? Does not Mrs. Dormer mourn? But she has the privilege of grieving openly; I must stifle my emotions because I am a girl, and defenceless—and already my feelings have been made the subject of common talk.

Have you forgotten what you told me on the race-course yesterday? Oh, yes, I do well to wear a mask; but it will not be necessary for long. I shall soon show an indifferent face like the rest—soon be able to boast an indifferent heart.”

All this had been uttered in low, rapid tones, with no sign of feeling. She would have passed on, but Bramwell detained her.

“*When* may I see you?”

“When? How can I tell? Remember that I have forbidden you to come to Alston. Wait till I am with the Dormers in London.”

“They will go to London! And you . . . you will laugh, dance, jest.”

“Yes, laugh, dance, jest,” she interrupted, a smile playing about her lips after the manner in which phosphorescent light might illuminate the face of a corpse; go to Hurlingham and Ascot, and dine at the Orleans, and spend idyllic Sundays, on the river, parade the Park, struggle for invitations to smart houses, and count myself blest if an Exalted Being remarks me

approvingly, or if my looks are commented upon in a society paper; be Lady Beauty here and Lady Gaiety there, and never, never Miss Melancholy. Amusement by day, chloral by night. You don't know your world, Dr. Bramwell. Do fashionable women stay at home and put on sackcloth because a friend has died suddenly?"

Her artificial manner, the little laugh which closed her speech, acted upon Bramwell like an electric shock. He started back with a gesture of shrinking, almost of aversion. Her defiant insensibility maddened him. Was she, after all, as cold-blooded as she wished him to assume? He had faced his own disappointment, and could endure the sickening pangs it inflicted; but with keener suffering rose all the more strongly passionate need for belief in her. That he should have misunderstood her might be pain; that she should show herself unwomanly was despair. He resented the hardness that belied his conception of her nature, even though it

might perhaps be interpreted on his own part as ground for renewed hope. Her next words deepened the sense of repulsion. She was looking away from him. In this obstinate avoidance of his eyes—he knew that they were charged with such solemn entreaty as must compel sincerity—lay his justification for faith.

“You begin to read my nature rightly at last. You see that I am thoroughly heartless—completely unworthy of your regard. Be it so, I have wished all along that you should understand me. I will not accept esteem that is based upon a false estimate of my character. Think of me as far more despicable than you even now imagine; and leave me—to fight my own battle with the world and with myself.”

She quitted him without glance or hand touch. A moment later she was in the hall kissing Mrs. Dormer, and with the same impassive face bidding farewell to her host, while she uttered some commonplace phrases of thanks and regret. Bramwell held aloof, and made no further attempt to obtain from

her any elucidation of the mystery which tormented him. Heart-sick and weary he turned away. . . The fly drove off. . . She was gone.

By noon all the guests had departed from Croxham with the exception of Dr. Bramwell, whose presence at the Coroner's Inquest was rendered necessary by his examination of the body after death.

Life seemed to him that day a dream within a dream. In movement or rest, in silence or speech, he was haunted by the image of Nadine, not as he had seen her face last on the staircase, pale and coldly defiant, but as it had appeared to him in the corridor during that weird flash of moonlight—spectral, ghastly as the face of one struck by a horror worse than death—murder, or shame! Yet how reconcile the one with his medical knowledge, the other with his unalterable conviction of Nadine's purity?

Had he then been the sport of an overwrought imagination?

Crushed down by the burden of these

thoughts, he was that evening languidly dressing for the melancholy meal which awaited him down-stairs, in grim contrast with the noisy repasts of the previous nights, when his attention was attracted by something glittering upon his dressing-table, and upon examination found that the gleam proceeded from a heart-shaped cluster of brilliants.

It was the ring which he had picked up in the corridor, and which, in his bewilderment and agitation, he had thrust into his breast and had forgotten.

Here was confirmation of his most torturing suspicions.

Many times, while bending over Nadine Senguin as she played to him in the drawing-room at Alston, Bramwell's eyes had lingered upon the cluster of diamonds that had been wont to adorn the little finger of her left hand.

BOOK IV.

CHAPTER I.

AN ACTRESS BEHIND THE FOOTLIGHTS.

FOR weeks Dr. Bramwell was preyed upon by gnawing care, to which the constant occupation that he was now forced into—for he had established himself in London—afforded almost the only anodyne.

Many times he was impelled to seek Nadine, to recount to her his tale, and to exact from her, denial or corroboration of his haunting fear. But the necessity for his constant presence in London, her stern prohibition upon his visiting her at Alston, and above all, dread of certainty, held him still in a state of tension and anxiety.

He dared not risk the extinction of his

faith which, notwithstanding all that he had seen and heard during his stay at Croxham, burned, if flickeringly, at times brightly as ever, when he recalled words and looks of Nadine's that told of reliance upon, and almost of affection for, himself. These were his consolation. He shrank from the possibility of losing those waking dreams and visions, which at moments, when his doubts were lulled and his judgment sleeping, created for him an illusory but intoxicating joy.

He heard later that she was in town with the Dormers; but their paths seemed to lie in separate directions, for his avocations did not naturally lead him into the circles which she frequented.

The Derby was run. Jack Halkett's tragically sudden death had become a story of the past. Garlands adorned the balconies of Belgravia and Mayfair, and London, grave and fashionable, frivolous and laborious, was in the full swing of summer life.

Occasionally Bramwell saw Nadine driving

down the Ladies' Mile, or riding in the Row, more lovely than ever, but with an expression of languor, almost, he fancied, of spirituality upon her face, that seemed to tell of some inward trouble or refining influence placing her apart from the gay herd, for whom life had so little meaning beyond the pleasure of to-day.

At the sight of her, his yearning to touch her hand, to hear her voice, intensified to craving. He wrote, begging that she would grant him an interview, if possible, alone. No subject could have sued more humbly for an audience from his queen. On her reply, he called at Mrs. Dormer's house at the hour, late in the afternoon, which she had named. The drawing-room was thronged, and Nadine, in her most artificial and least lovable mood, resisted all his mute pleadings for a word apart. He was angry and sore. But one look from her eyes, melting, beseeching, tender, directed towards him as they parted made him her slave once more. He saw that her lips were quivering, and felt that her

fingers pressed his ever so slightly when she bade him good-bye. Who does not know magnetic thrill, the strange, subduing sense of soul-communion which sometimes lingers after a hand-clasp? Bitterness, wrath, and distrust vanished from Bramwell's heart, and love and hope reigned there instead.

Not for long. The next morning a paragraph in one of the Society journals, at which he happened to glance, thrust him again into the depths of despair.

"On Friday evening Mrs. Granby Wilton opened her beautiful new house in Grosvenor Gardens. Royalty was present, and Royalty seemed to be especially happy; but the feature of the evening was the sensation caused by 'yet another' fair one, who, under the auspices of Mrs. Dormer, goes into the world for the first time this season. Young, beautiful, and graceful as an houri, Miss Senguin scored a decided success, and was honoured by marked attentions from the great ones of the earth."

Dr. Bramwell threw the paper from him in disgust, and went forth on his round.

What had he to do with this Nadine of the 'great world'?

Thus, in alternations of excitement and wretchedness, the days wore on. He made several more attempts to see Nadine alone, but to no purpose. It was evidently her wish to avoid him; and Mrs. Dormer, whose suspicions had been faintly aroused, and who, in atonement for her imprudence with regard to Colonel Halkett, was doing her best to achieve a brilliant marriage for her *protégée*, in spite of her sincere regard for Dr. Bramwell, looked upon him now with disfavour, and appeared an enemy rather than an ally.

One chance was left him. A ball in aid of some fashionable charity was shortly to be given in a great empty palace in Kensington. He knew that Nadine would be among those present. She could not refuse to dance with him. Here offered the opportunity for saying those words which he burned yet dreaded to utter. And apart from this motive for going, there was another still stronger. The longing to hold Nadine in his arms, to

feast his eyes upon her beauty, enhanced as it would be by all the cunningness of attire, even though he should realize that she must be renounced for ever, possessed him like thirst. Then shame smote him, and he recoiled before the might of his passion. A leprosy seemed to have blighted his love; it was no longer the pure devotion which had thrown a halo over all that was sordid in his life, and had sanctified womanhood in his eyes for the sake of her whom he hoped to win for his own.

His existence seemed to flow in two currents. Side by side with the daily routine of duty, the commonplace people whom he met and tended, was this keen vibrating consciousness, in which all his senses quivered, he scarce knew if with joy or pain. And if chill, gnawing thoughts sometimes came as unwelcome visitants, what matter? The present bounded the future.

* * * * *

Though it was comparatively early when Dr. Bramwell arrived at Kensington House,

the rooms were filling rapidly. He passed through the bower-like vestibule, lingering in the suite of ante-chambers, where banks of roses and hot-house flowers bloomed beneath drooping ferns and tropical palms, and where the mellow light of shaded tapers shone upon rare tapestry and antique cabinets, and mirrors reflected back the lustre of diamonds and the sheen of rich apparel; but he sought in vain for Mrs. Dormer's quaint, expressive face and the lily-like head rising behind it. Among the many beauties present Nadine had apparently not yet taken her place.

Later on he caught sight of the sweeping shoulders and perfect profile, as, smiling and curtseying, the brilliant throng drew back in lines, leaving a clear avenue for the passage of Royalty. Again, when the Hungarian Band broke into a strain of plaintive wildness, he lost her in the dance, and at last wandered forth to the long terrace, where a blaze of limelight, slowly deepening to rose, shed an ethereal radiance round the dark and light figures which passed to and fro, or descending

the great flight of steps, mingled with the loiterers in the garden. Bramwell leaned against the balustrade, his eyes fixed idly upon the moving kaleidoscope: nymph-like beings in ærial tulle and shimmering satin; virginal creatures of dove's plumage; maturer angels, not weaned from the frailties of humanity, whose rose-bloom might have been purchased at Rimmel's, with fairness enhanced by *poudre de Ninon*, and eyes brightened by antimony; matrons in sweeping robes and glittering *parures*; politicians, dignitaries, wits, guardsmen, fashionable butterflies, all jostled each other in the promenade. Now there was a scarcely perceptible flutter and rapid curtsey, as an exalted personage stopped to address a remark to some favoured acquaintance; or again, a momentary pause in the gurgle of conversation and laughter, as a great lady moved by the smiling groups on her way to the dancing-room.

The bloom of ripeness without; within, the rottenness of vanity, intrigue, and lust, which festers at the core of London Society.

Above the great stone house, all outlined in jets of coloured flame, two electric moons vied with the pale orb which sailed serenely in the blue heavens. They shed a spectral glow upon the winding walks and shrubberies enamelled with variegated lamps, and streamed across a sheet of ornamental water bright with the reflection of illuminated arches. Here Venetian gondolas, in which sat ghostly-looking figures, were noiselessly plying. Showers of fireworks rose and fell in luminous streaks and star-like clusters. The beech-trees, which at one point closed in the garden, were tipped with silvery light, and above them the spire of a neighbouring church stood out grey and solemn against the sky.

Bramwell's gaze was arrested by the object which it sought.

Nadine stood a few paces from him. She was bending forward, her statuesque arms resting upon the parapet, her eyes looking abstractedly towards the lake.

She was all in white; her dress floated

round her, a cloud of tulle; her bodice of satin defined the curves of her exquisite bust, and her neck and throat, with their enchanting dimples and indentations, rose fairer than the lace by which her bosom was veiled; a diamond star gleamed in her dusky hair. Between her clasped hands she held a large bouquet of white flowers, and her clear-cut face seemed to resemble the blossoms in its purity of outline and colouring.

For the moment she was alone. It was Bramwell's opportunity; he advanced. Nadine started as he addressed her, and turned with a half-frightened smile.

"Dr. Bramwell! I did not expect that *you* would be here to-night."

"I came to meet you," he answered impulsively.

"You are very welcome. Since you have become busy and famous we have seen nothing of you. Is that your fault, or ours? Oh, I know what you would say. In this garish London life there is no time for friendship. I hear that golden honours are already falling

thickly upon you, and that through your instrumentality the Race may be in a fair way to become immortal. Why do you not go out more? You might be a lion if you chose. Science is the foible of fashion just now."

Her tone jarred upon his nerves. He was silent, while she continued in her conventional manner,—

"How strange and unreal the garden looks. There's something ghastly in the mixture of moonlight and those coloured lamps. Did you ever off the stage see anything so like a transformation scene? A few grotesque masks, and one might be at Covent Garden Theatre."

"All life seems unreal sometimes," answered Bramwell, dreamily; then added, "Will you dance this with me—or rather, will you *not* dance it? I want to talk to you. Let us walk down towards the lake instead."

She seemed to hesitate for a moment, looking at him with mournful questioning, then assented, and placed her hand within his arm.

But as he felt her touch, and was moved by something in that timid gaze, the temptation of encircling her with his arm in the waltz was too potent to be resisted, and instead of leading her into the garden, he turned towards the ball-room.

A murmur of admiration followed her as she entered, and Bramwell's ears tingled as he overheard a dark-eyed lady with marigolds in her hair, who was the author of several volumes of erotic verse, say to a gentleman beside her,—

“That girl is just the combination to suit this naughty, white-washed age. She has the face of an angel, the grace and subtlety of a serpent, and the worldliness of a cocotte.”

Bramwell shuddered.

“What is the matter?” whispered Nadine, in those wooing tones which seemed to breathe poetry.

He placed his arm round her waist and piloted her across the floor. Her slight frame swayed reed-like in his arms as they glided

round to the strains of a dreamy waltz. To Bramwell's excited fancy lights, flowers, and glittering throng mingled in a confused billowy mass. The perfume which exhaled from Nadine's presence intoxicated his senses. To hold her thus was Paradise.

"Nadine!" he whispered passionately, almost below his breath, then paused abruptly and released her.

He saw that she was trembling and very pale, and her look was sweet and clinging.

"Take me out," she said brokenly; "I am so tired. This has been going on for so long, and I am weary, weary; and there has been no one to feel for me, or to say a word of sympathy. Don't ask me any questions, but be kind to me as you used to be. Let us go into the garden."

CHAPTER II.

IN THE PAVILION.

So bewildered was Bramwell by Nadine's rapid change of mood that he could only silently obey her entreaty. They went forth on to the terrace, then down the broad flight of steps into the garden. For a few moments they stood by the lake watching the gondolas gliding swan-like from bank to bank, and the fireworks shooting up into the sky, and descending in showers of stars and fiery streaks. Presently Bramwell led his companion into a sequestered walk which brought them to a pavilion almost concealed by the thick foliage of the shrubbery. This, like many other tents scattered about the grounds, was decorated with ferns and flowers, dimly lighted, and furnished with luxurious settees. He placed

Nadine on a couch, saying in that passionate tone which always seemed to affect her powerfully,—

“We will stay here.”

The curtains had fallen when they entered, over the entrance to the tent. They were completely alone. The murmur of music and of voices floated faintly across the lake, otherwise they might have been in the solitude of an enchanted forest.

Nadine leaned back on the couch, her white neck and the slender column of her throat defined against the cushions of Eastern stuff with which it was lined; her chin uplifted, her hands idly clasping her bouquet, her eyes fixed and melancholy, gazing abstractedly into space.

Dr. Bramwell stood looking down upon her. He saw then what he had hardly noticed before, that her face was worn, her eyes hollow, and that she looked very ill.

His heart was beating tumultuously. The almost voluptuous excitement which during the waltz had thrilled him had not yet

subsided ; but mingling with it was a feeling of stern revulsion and loathing of the leaven of passion that seemed now to blend mysteriously with his love. His spiritual attitude was one of conflict with his human impulses of late so strangely stimulated. Was it, that the indefinable change in Nadine had worked a corresponding alteration in himself, so that in his mind she was transformed from an angel who had been worshipped, to a syren whom it was his duty to shun ?

He felt the barrier which circumstance, his own shrinking from the pain of conviction, and her constrained, artificial manner had raised between them must, at all cost of suffering, be broken down to-night. His whole being was charged with the consciousness of impending crisis. He knew intuitively that Nadine's mood swayed towards his own, and that she too was passing through a phase of emotion in which reserve could not for long be maintained. It was as though winged words hovered in space around them, and Bramwell's abrupt utterance which broke the

silence seemed, but the echo of previous speech.

"Nadine, this mockery of fair appearance between us cannot be kept up any longer. It is six weeks since I besought your confidence before we parted at Croxham. Your boast then was an empty one. You *cannot* show an impassible face to the world, or delude yourself or others into the belief that you have an insensible heart. You act very well, but there is a strain which nature will not bear. I should be blind indeed if I could not see in you the signs of ever present pain. This gaiety, display, adulation can be no antidote to the misery that is poisoning your life. It brings you only weariness and sickening disgust."

"You are right," she answered listlessly. "Dead sea fruit. The taste of ashes is between my teeth."

"Why keep up the hollow farce?" cried Bramwell with indignant passion. "You do not deceive me. I—who of all men have the strongest claim upon you—I who love you

more madly than any other—read your suffering too plainly. Why try to deceive an idle crowd for which you care nothing? Go home. Make your moan if needs must, and overcome your trouble. Time blunts all emotions, softens the worst grief. But be true; be true to your womanhood. This seeming falsity in you, whom I have trusted and worshipped, is more bitter to me far than my own despair. Listen, Nadine.” He seated himself in a chair beside her; and resting his arms upon the head of her couch, while he gazed with solemn eyes at her averted face, continued, hurried out of himself, as it were, by the rush of agitated remonstrance, so that it seemed no longer Bramwell who was speaking. “This uncertainty is torture; I can bear no more. I have been a coward, dreading a sword-thrust that might kill my faith for ever. Better to brace myself and know the truth. I have a thing to tell you of that night at Croxham. No need for you to go back on memory; *that* page must be written in letters of fire—our fanciful

conversation in the hall, the legend of the White Lady,—you recollect? Your sudden paleness, the strangeness of your manner, the glance you interchanged with Halkett, your evasion of my appeal, all maddened me. I was torn by jealousy; horrible suspicions had entered my mind. I remembered Lady Alsager's words on the race-course—my brain was burning. When I had gone to my room to sleep was impossible. I could think only of you and of *him*. . . . You will recall the night it was—the sky overcast, the moon shining in fitful gleams, the wind risen and moaning sullenly, sweeping the turrets. Three o'clock had struck; everything was still except the wind. I had opened my window, and the lights upon my dressing-table were extinguished by a sudden gust. . . . It was then that I heard another sound—deeper—nearer than the blast—a sound of muffled, toilsome dragging, all down the corridor from the west wing, halting, now slow, then quicker. It approached my door, passed; and then there flashed through my mind the legend which had

been told us that evening. My brain was full of strange bewilderment; underlying all was the thought of you. It did not seem to be I myself who was waiting, listening. I scarcely knew whether I were awake, or in a dream, or in my right mind. . . . I looked forth into the corridor. *You*, maybe, know what shadowy woman's shape I saw in the dimness. Suddenly the wind stirred the curtain of an unclosed window. Moonlight streamed in—for a second the darkness was light, and I beheld the phantom figure and its burden. A broad ray flashed upon both. I saw the white face; I saw the glitter of diamonds upon the frenzied fingers; I saw the agonized hands clutch the dead body, and hurl it beyond the baize partition. Then all was blackness; the vision was no more. . . . A horror came over me. . . . When I rushed forward the corridor was empty."

Nadine's bouquet fell with a heavy thud, and lay bruised upon the floor. She half-rose, her lips parted, trembling in every limb, perspiration upon her brow.

"You—you *saw* this?" she gasped. "Oh no, no! It was fancy. Your brain had been excited. You slept, and dreamed that you were awake. This *was* so. No!" and she laughed wildly. "The ghosts at Croxham were walking, and it was the White Lady who passed through the corridor that night."

"I would sacrifice all my faith in science for such a belief, were it possible," said Dr. Bramwell sadly. "Yet so great was the shock, so horrible the fear, that then, even later, I might have persuaded myself that the vision had no existence except in my imagination had I not possessed proof positive of its reality."

"Proof! How? What proof?"

Nadine bent forward, an image of agonized alarm and entreaty.

"*This.*"

Dr. Bramwell held before Nadine a heart-shaped cluster of diamonds, which glittered now in the light of a coloured lantern pendent from the roof of the tent.

She clutched the ring; her eyes, like those of a wounded doe at bay, met his for an

instant. She uttered a low cry. Then a change came over her face, helplessness and marble stillness, and she sank back fainting against the cushions.

Reaction seized Bramwell. He bent over her, his whole being stirred to its depths by compassion, tenderness, and unreasoning wrath against himself. He reproached himself with inward bitterness for the abrupt manner in which he had broken to her his knowledge of the events of that tragic night. "Fool—brute that I am!" he muttered. He tore off her gloves, kissed her cold fingers, and chafed them between his own, whispering words of endearment, while by every means in his power he tried to reanimate the motionless form.

"Oh, Nadine!" he murmured, "my love, my darling! You bade me be kind, and, idiot-like, I have smitten you as though you were my enemy."

He pressed his lips to hers in a transport of passion. Never before had he so forgotten himself. She opened her eyes, and he saw

in them something of the same blank horror as had transfixed her features during that momentary flash of moonlight in the corridor at Croxham.

At this moment Bramwell was not master of himself. He experienced that feeling when the world and duty seem slipping away, and overmastering emotion is all that makes life real. Glamour, mystery, peril seemed to have transformed existence. Formerly, he had viewed it, as it were, from an altitude; now, it was as though he had descended, and urged by human passion, was struggling hotly with the baser crowd.

Nadine too appeared deeply moved, though after another fashion. The wild despair in Bramwell's eyes, the casting away of all his habitual self-control, had set her heart vibrating in new chords. Hitherto in their relations she had, while succumbing to a certain vague impressionability which it had been partly her pleasure to intensify, held herself mistress of her feelings and of the situation. But the change in Bramwell had wrought

one in her mental attitude towards him, and it seemed as though all instincts of domination, all surface emotions, had been swept away, and that they two stood alone in the universe, no longer as man to woman, but as soul to soul.

Impelled by this consciousness, and with the sense of a motive power at work within him,—not his own will, but something spiritual, which yearned in fierce pity towards her and towards himself,—Bramwell went on in low-toned eagerness,—

“It is not now between us a question of love given and sought; it is something deeper, touching our souls more closely. The remembrance of that night at Croxham is a chasm into which your fearless girlhood and my tender hopes have sunk. But *you* remain; *you*, the ideal or the woman, and my love, gold or dross. . . We can never be again as we were. We have probed dark realities that must make all commonplace intercourse, all conventional wooing, seem a mockery and a sham. . . . This life is

maddening; it is weaving garlands round the head of a corpse, disguised by the grinning mask of comedy. You cheat your world, Nadine; but *I* am not of your world. If I could convey to you what I have endured of late, even *you* would pity me. For the last six weeks I have been living through a horrible nightmare. It is true that but for the evidence of this ring, which I *saw* flash on the hand of the phantom woman as she passed into the darkness, I might have believed the scene a creation of my disordered brain, and might have convinced myself that you, lulled by my composing draught, were at that time sleeping peacefully, innocent of all part in Colonel Halkett's death."

"What!" cried Nadine, starting to her feet, and wrenching her hand from Bramwell's grasp. "It had entered your mind that I—that *I* murdered him?"

Bramwell was silent for a moment, then said in shaken tones,—

"You will understand that the morning

After that awful night, when I was taken straight into the presence of death, my mind was a maze of bewilderment and horror, and the most frightful suspicions were not unnatural. But examination dispelled them quickly. Colonel Halkett died suddenly of heart disease—so much is clear to me. The rest is a mystery, which has haunted me like a shadowy fiend. It has made the darkness fearful, and has turned my days into a waking nightmare. The misery was greater than could be borne. I determined that to-night I *must* know the worst. . . . Nadine!—oh do not cry; this unmans me. . . . Nadine, hear me.”

She had sunk down again, and with her hands covering her face, was sobbing uncontrollably. Whatever might be the contradictions of her nature, the strange blendings in it of impulsiveness and self-command, all were merged now in an outburst telling only of helplessness and despair. Could this be the pale, defiant woman who had borne herself so bravely in the supreme crisis of her fate?

She wept on, her frame shook with deep-drawn sobs. At intervals there fell from her lips low, heart-rending whispers, broken by pitiful gasps.

“Oh, what shall I do? What shall I do? Oh, my God, what can I do?”

Riven with the anguish of watching and hearing, Bramwell waited till the paroxysm had almost passed, and quivering sighs only came like those uttered by a child weary of crying. His worst dread seemed to have received confirmation, and to overwhelm him with deeply gathering horror. He sought refuge from it in hurried speech.

“There is one solution,” he said hoarsely. “I have repeated it to myself so often that it has become borne in upon me as truth, and has comforted me in my despair. Nadine, let me speak as though I were your brother. Trust in my loyalty, my reverence. That night—listen—is not this how it was? *He* forced his way into your room. You repulsed him. In the excitement and agitation death struck him?”

Bramwell paused and waited breathlessly for

her reply. None came. She sat motionless, her eyes bent downwards. In his agony he quitted her side and walked towards the door of the tent. Here he stood for several moments looking earnestly upon her, while there was still silence. At length the strain became unbearable, and he turned his face resolutely away from her.

Aware of the movement, she seemed to interpret it as a sign of desertion. For a second the old defiance revived. She uplifted her head, her lips framed the words,—

“Go; think the worst of me that you choose. I can live without you.”

Though she had spoken so low as to be inaudible, his mind grasped at her meaning. He turned once more, uttering an ejaculation of reproach. As she met his gaze the momentary expression of defiance vanished; once more her features and attitude conveyed only imploring dependence.

“Where can I look for help if not from you?” she murmured, slightly extending her arms.

O obeying the gesture of appeal, he moved impulsively to her and clasped her hand, his touch seeming to convey the solemnity of a pledge.

"I will help you," he said, "through anything, everything, if there be need of my help; only trust me. Remember that I am ignorant, and that I have been racked by doubts that may have wronged you. Remember that I love you. . . . But all personal feeling is merged in the longing to answer to your need, whatever it may be. I was wrong to speak so insistently; it was cruel. Tell me only what you feel it a relief to say."

She motioned him from the chair on which he knelt to a place on the couch near her.

"Sit there—so. . . . And don't look at me. I will try to tell you. . . . I don't know if I can—all; but I will try. . . . And you will be patient; you will try to understand?"

His only answer was to tighten his clasp of her hand. Nadine went on in broken

language, her thoughts following a mental sequence independent of the order of events, pausing frequently, and speaking in beseeching accents as a child might who was confessing a fault of which it dreaded to reveal the worst consequences.

“It is not as you think—not quite. Think worse than that—if it be worse. . . . You remember what I said long ago at Alston—how long ago it is!—about evil lying latent in our natures and springing up at an outward touch? Vanity, love of power, all sorts of desires and impulses, which seem to tell of something in us that we had never dreamed of till we grow frightened at ourselves, and our brain becomes confused between true right and what the world calls right. . . . Ah! there is the contradiction! Within and without the law, human instincts are the same, love is the same; and yet it is only a shadow, a form of words that makes the distinction between virtue and vice.”

CHAPTER III.

NADINE'S CONFESSION.

NADINE paused; Bramwell could not speak. The silence seemed heavy with coming revelation. The very drawing of his breath was pain. After a minute Nadine went on, gathering up the scattered threads,—

“It began to come upon me that time in London that I wasn’t like others—that there were in me capacities for strong feelings, and all sorts of mixed impulses making me restless, and drawing me against myself. I wanted to understand life; I wanted to love. I did let myself love, when something told me it was wrong. I knew that I wasn’t like a girl—that I did not shrink from things which . . . —and that made me afraid. I had no one to whom I could speak. Women are hedged

in and tied round. To be true to themselves is to be false to their sex. . . . I felt myself to be half-hard, half-impetuous, cynical, calculating, and daring at the same time, so that I could rush to a precipice and yet pause on the brink and count the cost of falling. . . . And it seemed a noble thing to fling oneself down in the hope of saving another whom one loved from a base, unhappy life. But there was not only that feeling. I don't want you to think better of me than I deserve: there were other feelings more unworthy—I was afraid of being forsaken. I had set a fire burning, and I could not quench it—and I could not fly. . . . Ah, do you not understand? You said that you would help me. You might have helped me then; you can't lift me up now. . . . You said that my good name was sacred to you. *It is at your mercy.*" The tear rolled down her cheeks. Suddenly she looked at him and said, swayed by a less selfish emotion, "I give you great pain?"

"The worst pain," said Bramwell very low,

"is in knowing that I can do nothing for you."

"This is weakness," said Nadine. "I should have defied you—braved everything. I thought that I could do so; but it was impossible. Whenever I met your eyes they seemed to say, 'I know your secret,' and they made me loathe everything. And I am lonely, I am very wretched; this struggle is wearing me out."

For the first time since she had bidden him avert his eyes Bramwell looked at her. She withdrew her hand from his and hid her face, while sobs again rent her frame. The anguish of hearing her confession had become so great that personal feeling held at this moment no place in Bramwell's consciousness. The blow had fallen, and still, it seemed now that for a long time certainty had been in his mind. A great wave had rolled over him, and he was left mentally stunned. Yet from the trough of despair he clutched at a straw, the last shred of his faith. He said huskily,

"But you were deceived—you believed him free."

There was silence. Again Bramwell turned away his eyes. To watch her struggling sobs was too painful. She continued, in an undertoned utterance, still in the same fragmentary manner,—

"I did not know,—not at first,—only I seemed to understand always that there was a bar. They did not tell me that he was married—till afterwards. . . . But it was not as people thought. That knowledge made very little difference. The feeling was too strong: it was like thirst. I used once to laugh to myself over poetry and romances; and I thought that to love in that way was unnatural—just as I always fancied that temptation of such a kind could never come near me. It was a mystery. I was a mystery to myself. . . . I could not bear the dread lest he might ever forsake me. I knew dimly that he did not care for me in the way that—as *you* cared for me. But it made no difference—

nothing made any difference. . . . It was fascination, something which compelled me from the first. I was always thinking of him, when I was alone or with others—always wanting to tell him of thoughts which came into my mind—longing for the touch of his hand or a look from his eyes—longing to hear him say that I made his life better, that I was his good angel. Oh me! it seems now such mockery, such mockery! . . . And then, when he talked of our going away to another land, of our being husband and wife in God's sight—I wondered often if there were any God, and if there were, how it could give Him pleasure to torture a weak girl like me, when it would have been so easy for Him to order everything differently. I thought of you, and of how you did not believe in the after-world. And then it seemed to me that if there were no immortal future, all the creeds and codes of this world went for nothing; and that it was only just that we should take the joys offered us, when the doing so would wrong no one. I felt that you must

have a law of morality more righteous than that of churches, and that if I could tell you everything you might perhaps help me. . . . That was what was in my mind when I came back from London. And I tried to tell you—that night at Alston.”

A pang of exceeding bitterness pierced Bramwell's heart when, even at that moment, it struck him as characteristic of Nadine's egoistic temperament that she should have considered only her own need, and should have felt no compunction for the pain that she inflicted upon him. He started back as though the thought had been treason and involuntarily shuddered, for it revealed to him too surely that his goddess had fallen.

By some subtle current of sympathy the same idea darted through Nadine's mind.

“You think that I was heartless, that I had no remorse for the suffering I must cause you. . . Dr. Bramwell, if I were to try till Doomsday to analyze my feelings towards you then, and now, they would still remain a mystery. I did not wish you to think

well of me, and yet I shrank from appearing despicable to you. You had a strange influence over me—always. It began partly in myself. I yielded to the impression, I wished to deepen it, and yet to keep the reins; I wished to experimentalize on you and on myself. Now you see that I am calculating. But it was more—more than mere coquetry and love of power. . . . The knowledge that you believed me innocent seemed a safeguard against evil desires. It would have been better for us both if you had doubted me. I had a notion that because of your character, your profession, you must have a keener insight than most men into human nature. And yet, when I saw daily how little you understood me—! But I wished to tell you everything. Does not that show you how I trusted you? . . . I don't know why I had this impulse, except that I wanted you to understand me. I was afraid of myself; I was afraid of committing suicide, as it were; and I knew that if I were on the point of destroying myself morally, and

it was right that I should be saved, you would save me, even against myself. . . . That night while I played—it was on my lips; but the very sense that I had power over you, that I could stir your feelings by a word, a look, held the confession back. I could not endure to lose the power. . . . And then you said that you loved me. . . . And all that was worst in me came uppermost; it was like the taste of blood to a wild creature which had been brought up tame—wicked thoughts, cold, cruel plans of deceiving and— Then afterwards, loathing of myself. . . . Do you hate me now ? ”

“It could never be my impulse to hate you,” said Bramwell in deep-shaken tones. “Oh, that you had confided in me!” he exclaimed in passionate sorrow. “I would have saved you,—at the cost of tearing the heart from your bosom, at the cost,” and his voice sank to a fierce whisper, “of taking the tempter’s life. Nadine,” he went on more gently, “I don’t want you to be oppressed by a sense of guilt towards me.

You were under no obligation to love me, and now you have enough to bear without the added pain of thinking that you have wronged me. Why did you not trust me? Could you not have believed that my devotion was not wholly selfish, that I could have found consolation for my own sorrow in comforting you—in instilling into your mind the truth that no love can be perfect unless it be pure?"

"No," said Nadine; and in the movement of her uplifted chin there was some faint, pitiful trace of her former self. "You do not yet understand me. I have not sunk so low as to humble myself in penitence before you. I am not repentant. My nature has made my fate, and I have obeyed it. All that I have bad in me now was in me before, and more—for now I am cutting myself off from a temptation which you do not know of. . . . This is not the true Nadine. The real woman is she whom you see in crowds—too proud to court pity, masking misery under smiles. But to-night

the stress is harder than human nature can support; the springs are broken. I *must* speak—I *must* have a word of sympathy—or die.”

Her voice gathering intensity with compressed passion, broke suddenly. She turned towards Bramwell, and her eyes, wild and dilated, met his full. The anguish of pity in his face, which no words could represent, seemed to throw her back into the attitude of helpless appeal that all through the interview had impressed him so strangely. She leaned a little towards him, and began again in a frightened whisper.

“I *must* speak—I *must* tell you, or I shall go mad. Sometimes I think that I *am* mad. Oh, the darkness! the horrible darkness! Even though there is light in the room it seems always dark; and I see *it*. . . . I see it always—everywhere—most distinctly at night. It is outside myself, and yet it is *me*. . . . That white woman, with her long hair—and her staring eyes. . . . And her arms strained—clutching—dragging—and oh!

so heavy, so heavy. . . . And the horror—the dread lest strength should fail, and I should sink before the door is reached! I see the dead face. . . . Oh, my God, what shall I do? How shall I escape from it?”

She crouched down shuddering convulsively; her lips remained parted, and her eyes were fixed blankly in space upon the vision which her imagination had conjured. Bramwell had no words in which to soothe her. He could only look dumbly and fold her hands more tightly between both of his. Deepening the sense of unreality, and, as it were, in grim mockery of his own wretchedness and of the unhappy woman's despair, a weird melody, one of the Hungarian national airs transposed as a waltz, floated down from the ball-room, and with it mingled the sound of voices and laughter as every now and then the *portière* of the pavilion was brushed aside by some passing promenader; while through the aperture were revealed fitful rays of the electric light, which coldly illuminated the glade. But from all sense of outward incongruity

Nadine seemed far removed. Under the stress of that strange impulse which prompted her to self-revelation, she proceeded, still in the same unnatural whisper,—

“I will tell you the truth—of that night. I want you to understand, so that everything may be bare between us; and then I want you to leave me, and never by word or look remind me in future of what I have told you. I wish your knowledge to be my safeguard. It was as you thought—partly. That day when you spoke to me on the racecourse, and I said that perhaps shortly you would look upon me with horror,—you remember?—my mind was made up. I had determined to forsake my home and my father, and to go and live with *him* in another land, far away—where there could be no deceiving. And yet I felt a wicked joy in deceiving. . . . But it was the being with you that turned my thoughts backward—to papa, and the old life; and I repented. *He* was with me. He was full of excitement and joy. You know he had won largely that day, so that

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everything was easy. It was as though Fate were throwing riches, opportunity, all into our hands. But I said that we would wait a little longer. I said that we were acting a lie, and that a scene in the drama more or less did not matter. And he replied in a way that maddened me—and I reproached him. And then—then it was all over in a minute—and I sat holding his dead hand, and knowing that the curse had fallen on me. . . . This is why I have told you. If I know that I have told you, it may seem to me perhaps more like a dreadful dream, and I may be saved from doing in madness something which could never be altered—which would haunt me in life and when I was dead. . . . For,” and her voice grew terrible in its low distinctness, “all sorts of things are in my mind. I am afraid of what I may do in the future—I am afraid—The thought has come to me sometimes that if I were to marry—and some day I shall forget and be tempted, and I shall marry—that I should kill . . . the impulse would come to me to act it all through again. It

would be like fulfilling a doom. . . . That is the feeling which was in me before—before you came to Croxham—that there was a curse upon me. . . . I had struggled—and after I had— Then wicked spirits possessed me. . . . I did not know before what it would be. And then—when I knew, and it was done, and could never be undone all my life through, I wished to give myself up utterly, so that there could be no turning back. It seemed to me that it did not matter any more what happened to me. I wanted to defy people. But still I used to pray that his wife might die. If by *willing* I could have killed her, God's lightning would have struck her dead. That was what made me feel most that I had become wicked. Often at night when there were strange sounds in my room I would fancy that the evil ghosts of Croxham were gathered round my bed, saying to each other, 'She is lost—she is one of us. She must obey her doom.' . . . And that night—the dead face was turned up to mine—and the dear eyes. . . . My life seemed outside

me—my life, my love, my honour, all. . . . I tried to shriek, but no voice came. . . . and the spirits pressed round me. . . . the room was full of voices crying, ‘Shame—despair!’ An icy coldness crept over me; I was like stone. And I said, ‘I will defy the world; I will save myself.’ And I lifted *it* up—and the eyes seemed to say, ‘Save yourself!’ and I dragged, and dragged, and dragged—oh, the terrible way!—all down the silent corridor—past door after door, with my body bending under the weight of the dead limbs, and my heart turned to stone. The strength that was in me seemed not mine. It was not *I*. . . . it was the spirit of the wicked lady of Croxham. . . . And I knew it, and she laughed in my ear—as at nights she laughs still. . . . and I was afraid lest she should desert me, and I should have no more power, and the door would be closed.”

Again a fit of shuddering seized her; again the strength which his touch brought her carried her on.

“You see, it is like a crime—burned into

me. . . . But I did not do anything really wicked. I had not stolen or committed murder, or injured another person. It was I only who was injured. Surely we have a right to shape our own lives as we choose. Why should I be haunted as the vilest murderer might be haunted? The misery of having lost my happiness is light pain compared to the torture of inward conflict—the terror of things unseen—the terror of myself. This is what I cannot bear.”

There was a note of pathetic, forlorn protest in her voice. It was pitiful to witness the warring of her members, the effort at self-comprehension, the groping after self-justification.

“You will not believe,” said Bramwell with sorrowful sternness, “that your higher nature is avenging itself.”

Nadine did not answer. Bramwell, stooping, raised her fallen bouquet, and mechanically began to remove the bruised blossoms. There seemed something suggestive in the action. She held out her hand and took the bouquet

from him, saying in a tone half-mournful, half bitter,

“You can never make it fresh again.”

At that moment the curtain of the pavilion was drawn aside, and a great personage with a beautiful woman upon his arm entered, not observing at the first glance that the place was tenanted. Nadine rose hurriedly; then, self-possession regained, curtsied as she replied to the gracious remark addressed to her, and, followed by Bramwell, passed out into the garden.

The scene fitfully illuminated, the festoons of jewel-like lights, the strains of music and array of moving figures, acted more quickly upon her mobile temperament than upon that of Bramwell. To him the contrast between mood and surroundings seemed sacrilegious, and he longed wildly to bear her away into darkness and solitude. She paused as they passed a fountain, and stooping, dipped her fingers into the basin and lightly bathed her eyes.

“Back to the *raree-show*,” she said

bitterly. "There must be no tears under the mask. Enough has been said to make you despise and forsake me. That is what I wish. Let the past be buried. The book is sealed for ever between you and me; never try to open it."

"Nadine!" cried Bramwell, swept along by a passion from which in any saner moment he might have shrunk appalled, "I can never forsake you; the past cannot be buried in this way. As well bid me forget that I am myself. My life is yours; and how can I serve you better than by standing between you and the world—between you and your worst self? Let me restore to you the purity which is a part of your real nature. Have faith in yourself. Take comfort from my faith in you——"

She interrupted him, shaking her head and looking at him almost pityingly.

"No, no; all this capacity for high feeling exists only in your conception of me. That is how you fail to obtain any real mastery over me: you will not see me as I am—

the slave of a temperament, which I accept as a fate, and would not escape from if I could, because I can realize no other."

"You shall not take this view of yourself," exclaimed Bramwell fervently. "You shall, you *must* see your true self in the image of you that is mirrored in my mind. Be my wife. Let our marriage be a new starting-point for the future. I do not ask your love; I can be content with your confidence. I ask nothing but the right to protect and comfort you."

Nadine turned away, and for a moment seemed to be battling with fresh emotion. At last she said, in a voice very tender, and at the same time unutterably sad,—

"You offer to marry me, notwithstanding the thing you know of me—*you* of all men? And I thought you cold! Ah me! But I said—I said always that you would be very loyal. Do you not know that I have told you everything in great part because I wished to cut you off for ever from any thought of that kind? I think that

you are capable at this moment of the most complete self-sacrifice ; but I am not base enough to accept it from you. That would be murder indeed—murder of my own better instincts—murder of your peace, of everything. Think what it would be to live with a woman whom you despised, and who hated you—for I should hate you. No ; to-morrow, when you are calm, you will be deeply thankful that I have refused to accept your devotion. It will be the only cause for gratitude that I shall ever have given you. The kindest wish I can frame for you is that you may learn to love another woman. As for me, it is better that I should sink to my level, and marry—if I ever do marry—a man who will require from me no more than I can give. You and I must remain apart. I beseech you for the present at least to avoid me. To-morrow I may repent the impulse which to-night has prompted my confession to you, and the very sight of you may goad me to something worse. Henceforth on this subject your lips are sealed

even to me. Remember this, and for the rest, we are as completely divided, in all sense of marriage, as priest and nun."

He began to speak, but she stopped him with an imperious gesture.

"No—no more. For your own sake be silent, and from this time shun me as you would shun your worst enemy. Now, take me back to the ball-room."

BOOK V.

CHAPTER I.

IN THE VALLEY OF DESPAIR.

FOR nearly six months Dr. Bramwell saw nothing of Nadine Senguin. She left London soon after the ball at Kensington House, and he heard of her vaguely as having refused to join the Dormers in a yachting expedition, and as being occupied at Alston in attendance upon her invalid father.

This news Bramwell hailed as the harbinger of awakening good.

He had obeyed her command, and had sedulously avoided all possibility of the renewal of their intercourse. In this he had acted partly from deliberation. He was afraid for himself. Though his love

had gained, if possible, in intensity, he was able to recognize in it an element, as it were, of witch-craft, which might in a moment of passion overcome his better judgment. Absent from Nadine, the feeling of revulsion deepened, though blending with it was a pity almost divine. He loathed the sin, yet after a manner revered the sinner; and at this time the consecration of himself to her need seemed the mournful yet sweet necessity imposed upon him by his love and by her fall. The future held hope; but in the present he acknowledged it best for her sake and for his own that they should remain apart.

His work was the safety-valve for all pent-up emotion. He threw himself with ardour into the practice of his profession and the prosecution of scientific discovery. Several slight circumstances, apart from the attention which his medical work had excited among *savants*, combined to bring him into notoriety. In a shorter space

than he could have imagined possible, the prosperous career, of which in the old days at Alston he had lovingly dreamed, seemed opening before him. Yet with opportunity there appeared to have vanished the zest for fame, the incentive towards worldly endeavour.

One evening when he had come home late from his round, he found awaiting him the following letter from Mrs. Dormer :—

“Croxham, November 2nd.

“DEAR DR. BRAMWELL,

“Have you become too busy to remember old friends, or are you not yet famous enough to allow yourself a Sunday’s holiday, and run down to Croxham for dinner on Saturday evening, returning, after the custom of London men, by our early Monday train?

“I wish that you could come to us on the 10th. We shall have comparatively an empty house—only two or three country neighbours collected for the first meet near here of the Chauceley hounds—and Mrs. Bartelotte and her husband. You will remember her as connected with poor Jack Halkett’s melanchol

death in the spring. None of the same party have been here since; and I, who am, as you know, impressionable to such influences, dread a reunion shadowed by the memory of a lost friend. But my husband, who laughs at any sentimentality on my part, insists that Mrs. Bartelotte, who is a particular favourite of his, should be asked, and it was with difficulty that I persuaded him to arrange Nadine Senguin's long-promised visit for a week later, when we have some balls in prospect. I mention this that you may choose your own time if the 10th does not seem to you to promise sufficient attraction. In any case you need only telegraph an hour beforehand. Apart from the pleasure of seeing you, I am anxious to consult you about my own health, which has not been of late as satisfactory as I could wish. With my husband's kindest remembrances,

“I am very sincerely yours,

“NELLIE DORMER.”

So bitter was the remembrance of his last visit to Croxham, that Bramwell's first impulse was to refuse the invitation. Had

he not been assured of not meeting Nadine Senguin, he must at once have declined it. To be thrown into her society in that house would be too painful. As it was, his conscience smote him with regard to the Dormers, to whom he felt himself to be under obligations. With Mrs. Dormer he had always been particularly intimate; and he knew that in the treatment of her malady, one of the nerves complicated by troubles that she had confided to him, connected with her domestic life, no one could be so successful as himself; while her reliance upon his help and sympathy established a claim upon him which he would not willingly evade.


He wrote vaguely that he would try to make arrangements for the 10th, and added that, owing to his press of engagements, he would avail himself of Mrs. Dormer's permission to telegraph a few hours only before his departure from London.

It was late upon a raw November day when he arrived at Croxham. The dressing bell had rung, and he was at once taken to

his room, the same which he had occupied upon his former visit; and only made his appearance in the drawing-room simultaneously with the butler who announced dinner.

Harry Dormer, brilliant in pink, his good-humoured face almost as bright as his coat, glowing after a hard day across country, paused in the act of offering his arm to old Lady Critchell and shook hands with Bramwell.

“Well, Doctor, I’m glad to see you. Wish you could have managed to get down earlier. It was a stunning run. I wouldn’t mind laying long odds the best we shall see this season. Dear! dear! Do you recollect the last time you were at Croxham? I thought of poor Jack Halkett this afternoon riding home from Burswell. You were very near having a case waiting for you—an accident to the phaeton; Lumley’s charioteering. I’ve got a bone to pick with you, Deodatus, about my chestnut mare’s broken knees. Happily beyond that, no harm was done except a shaking, and the young lady whom



he was driving so recklessly is keeping her room this evening. Allow me, Lady Critchell. Bramwell, you will take in Mrs. Bartelotte."

Presently Bramwell found himself seated beside that vivacious lady, whose spirits seemed in no way to have suffered from certain reverses at Newmarket which she shortly confided to her companion.

"You see that I am as inveterate a gambler as of old, Dr. Bramwell. Ever since that extraordinary dream of Jem Ormthwaite's about the winner of the Chollerton Cup, I've taken to racing instead of *trente et quarante* as an outlet for my wickedness. Anyhow, Epsom and Newmarket are handier than Monte Carlo, and I guess they are more respectable. Well, and what have you been doing since I saw you last? I hear you are fixed up convenient in London. Have you found out yet why poor Jack Halkett did not die a little sooner or a little later? That's the worst of you doctors—you are always too late to do any good except find a reason for things. I must say I don't care about

reasons. Do you remember how we all bundled off that morning as grim as mutes at a funeral? Poor Jack! I dare say you wouldn't believe that I had a good cry when I got home that evening. You were very nearly coming in for another tragedy to-day. Mr. Lumley and Miss Senguin were in such state of excitement or mental aberration that they forgot they were hunting on wheels, and tried to jump a stone wall. Oh, you need not look so frightened—no bones were broken, and the worst result of the catastrophe is, that the beautiful Nadine is having tea and toast in her bed-room instead of gladdening our eyes down-stairs."

"Is Miss Senguin here?" asked Dr. Bramwell abruptly, turning to Mrs. Dormer, who was on his other hand.

"She came yesterday," was the reply. "I dare say that you are surprised. So was I when I got a letter from her a few days ago, saying that she hated balls and large country-house parties, and wished to come to us

now for a little milder dissipation. But you will have discovered, Dr. Bramwell, that Nadine's moods are somewhat incalculable. This accident is unfortunate, though she is not the least hurt, and would not let me send for Dr. Hervey. However, I insisted upon her keeping quiet this evening."

Deeply disturbed, Bramwell turned with little appetite to the business of dinner. He had been at pains to avoid Nadine; he dreaded meeting her, and yet now that he learned suddenly the fact of her presence under that roof with him, his heart throbbed with wild pleasure, his pulses tingled at the anticipation of again touching her hand, and it seemed impossible that he could for so long have voluntarily denied himself the joy of beholding her. But he asked no further questions, and took his part as best he could in the conversation that flowed around him. Fortunately Mrs. Bartelotte required little entertainment, but rippled on in her low-toned monologue, which, if it produced upon the senses an impression as

vague as the sound of running water, had at least the merit of effectually filling up blanks. The party was comparatively a small one, consisting, besides the guests in the house, of a neighbouring squire and his wife, the parson and his wife, and Sir Peter and Lady Critchell. Sir Peter was a bluff, ruddy-faced old gentleman, who revered no personages upon earth except his sovereign and a genuinely successful M. F. H., and who was now with sepulchral distinctness epitomizing the claims to social consideration, from a fox-hunting point of view, of a gentleman who had lately established himself in the neighbourhood, and who had been so unfortunate that day as to provoke Sir Peter's ire by an ill-timed jest at a blank covert.

"H'm!" grunted Sir Peter. "He don't like foxes. I don't call that *foolish*; I call it *wicked*. I don't mean to say," after a pause devoted to an attack upon the wing of a pheasant, "that he's a *bad* man. Don't hunt, but lets other people hunt; don't

shoot, but lets other people shoot; don't drink, but keeps good wine. But he jokes about foxes; and I tell you what it is"—glaring fiercely round—"foxes are too serious a subject to be joked about in *this* country."

"Well, I will say," said Mrs. Bartelotte with her air of candour, "that you make as much fuss over foxes in your country as we do over Congress men in ours. I'm doing my best to respect British institutions, Sir Peter, but I reckon the world wouldn't stop still, after all, if a fox were killed at Dunkley Beeches instead of Gripely Wood."

"You think so, ma'am; do you?" growled Sir Peter, and betook himself again to the discussion of his pheasant; whereupon Harry Dormer, who liked nothing better than to chaff Mrs. Bartelotte, tried to draw her out upon the subject of British institutions in general, but she refused to answer to the bait, and with a pretty grimace turned to Dr. Bramwell and caused him to become first red, then white, by inquiring whether

he had yet made acquaintance with any of the Croxham ghosts. Mrs. Dormer was not in her usual spirits. She looked pale, and it was evident that she was suffering. Conversation flagged in the drawing-room, and there was no music to enliven the evening. Lady Critchell set example to the other guests by an early departure, and before half-past ten all the ladies had retired. Dr. Bramwell, after a short conference with Mrs. Dormer, when, concerned at the state of her health, he urged her to remain in her room during the following day, joined the gentlemen in the smoking-room for a little while; then, on the plea of having some important writing to finish, excused himself to his host and went to his own old room.

The associations connected with the chamber were as fresh in his mind as though Colonel Halkett's death had taken place but yesterday. Every trifling detail of surrounding,—the arrangement of the furniture, the folding of the drapery, the blazing logs

upon the hearth,—all recalled to him the strange phase of consciousness through which upon that terrible night he had passed, and seemed to arouse the same mysterious expectancy and sense of coming evil which he had experienced then.

He tried to turn his thoughts from this painful retrospect, and spreading on the table before him the work which he had brought, set himself resolutely to his task. But unintelligible sentences flowed from his pen, and the image of Nadine persistently obtruded itself between his eyes and the page upon which they were bent; so that perforce he yielded to the mood of melancholy reverie which was creeping over him, and leaning back in his chair, lost himself in a train of reflection in which bitter regret over the past mingled with dread of the future, wonder how Nadine would greet him upon the morrow, and excited longing for the hour of meeting.

Midnight pealed forth from the turret clock. Roused by the chime, Bramwell started,

heaved a regretful sigh, and again braced himself to his writing. The room felt chilly, for the fire had burned low. He rose to replenish it, and as he did so a timid knock sounded at his door. He waited for a second, doubtful. It was repeated, and the door pushed slightly ajar, while a voice which thrilled through his frame said very low,—

“It is I—Nadine.”

Sick with the anticipation of some new evil, and yet hardly astonished,—for Nadine’s actions could be predicted by no known rules governing human impulse,—Bramwell gave her admission; and she stood in his presence white and almost as terror-stricken as upon the night to which his thoughts now involuntarily reverted.

She was dressed in a loose cashmere robe that, clinging to her form, displayed its outlines clearly. In an instant his practised intelligence had grasped her imminent need. His worst horror confronted him. She had come to him for aid in the direst extremity which can befall a woman.

He stood, almost as pale as she was, waiting for her to speak. Suddenly she divined that he knew her secret. A wave of crimson swept over her face. She advanced with drooped eyes, and said in an imperative whisper,—

“I want you to come at once to my room.”

He bowed his head, and still without speaking followed her down the long dim corridor till they turned into the west wing. Here she paused, and motioned him to enter a room the door of which stood partially open; then closed it behind them both and turned the key.

The chamber was in order; the fire burned brightly, the candles were lighted upon the dressing-table; a white camellia in a vase upon the mantel-piece appeared to have been placed there in readiness for her wearing. All kinds of daintinesses and expensive trifles were scattered about. He noticed these details even at this moment, for the stamp of Nadine's individuality seemed imprinted upon all. He shuddered as his eye caught

the reflection of her haggard features in a pier glass opposite him. All the grace and sweetness of girlhood had fled from them. She stood before him a desperate woman, threatened swiftly and suddenly by the most terrible danger.

"You see," she began in a hard, concentrated tone, "my doom has come upon me. You—*you* only can save me from a fate worse than death. If you will not save me I must kill myself. I cannot . . . I cannot" Her voice broke; she sank upon the ground at his feet and seized his hands. "What shall I do? Oh, what shall I do?" she moaned. "On all sides nothing but despair. I had come here with the thought that I would confess all to Mrs. Dormer; . . . but now—it is impossible. . . . And when I heard that you were near me,—in the house,—it was like a ray of light in blackness—like the clutch of a hand when I was sinking. . . . I said to myself that you would not forsake me And you will not—you cannot?"

Her face was upturned to his in an agony of beseeching; tears rolled down her cheeks. He raised her gently, but with reproving firmness. There was in him no impulse to tenderness. Instead, a steel-like insensibility seemed to have crept over him, numbing all his capacity for emotion.

"I will not forsake you," he answered, very low. "Nadine, I will save you—if it be possible."

CHAPTER II.

DECEPTION.

ABOUT nine o'clock the following morning Harry Dormer, turning sleepily upon his pillow, received a message to the effect that Dr. Bramwell wished to speak to him immediately.

"Well, Doctor," was the greeting which Bramwell received as he entered his host's dressing-room, "what is up now? Your presence at Croxham seems invariably the harbinger of ill-luck. Have you come to break the news of some new tragedy? Out with it. Let me hear the worst at once. Is any one dead, or dangerously ill?"

"You jump quickly at conclusions," answered Bramwell gravely. "It is true that I have some unpleasant news for you. No

one is dead; but Miss Senguin is seriously ill."

"Nadine Senguin!" Harry Dormer started up in consternation. "All, I suppose, owing to the confounded carelessness of Deodatus Lumley. I wish I had seen him hanged before I let him drive my chestnut mare. Well, what has happened? My wife saw Miss Senguin last evening, and there did not appear to be anything greatly amiss. Has there been any alarming change? Were you called to her during the night?"

"Yes," answered Bramwell mechanically. Harry Dormer's habit of rapid conjecture rendered his task comparatively easy. "The case was imperative. You will forgive me for assuming the responsibility of stringent measures. Miss Senguin has sustained a severe shock to the nervous system; and in the event of cerebral inflammation setting in, the worst results are to be feared. Absolute quiet is essential to her safety. I will not answer for the consequences if any one but the nurse or myself is allowed to enter her

room. I have already secured from the village the services of Mrs. Gaythorne, in whom, as you know, I can place entire confidence."

"But—Dr. Hervey," said Mr. Dormer in a bewildered manner, "you will send for him and consult with him about the case, for I presume that you will not be able to remain in attendance upon Miss Senguin. Is this out of the question? Pray consider, Bramwell, whether it is impossible for you to combine this with your London engagements; you would, by doing so, confer an inestimable boon upon us, and, I need not add, upon Nadine's father."

"I have already considered the matter," replied Bramwell with grave decision; "and if you will allow me, have determined to remain here. Both on account of my presence in the house, and of my friendship with the family, I think it well that I alone should have the care of Miss Senguin in this illness; I have been fortunate enough to win Mr. Senguin's good opinion, and he will more willingly confide his daughter's treatment to my discretion than to that of a comparatively

new acquaintance. I must insist upon his making no attempt to see her, and must beg you to help me in enforcing my prohibition."

"Willingly, Doctor," said Mr. Dormer, grasping Bramwell's hand. "Consider everyone in the house at your orders. You have taken a weight off my mind by deciding to remain. I have the most complete confidence in your skill and judgment, and in this can speak for Mrs. Dormer even more strongly than for myself, who fortunately have never had occasion to test your powers of healing. She has greater faith in you than in any one else in the world, morally and medically, I think I may say," added he with a smile. Bramwell's eyes drooped ; his face flushed, then grew pale, and he turned away without uttering any acknowledgment of Mr. Dormer's flattering speech. He stood for a few moments as if in inward debate, then said harshly and abruptly,—

"Though I cannot deny that imminent danger might be anticipated if my directions were not strictly carried out, I see at present no reason for consulting with Hervey. Should

there arise any later, I will send for him. Pray do not alarm Mrs. Dormer. Assure her that I have every hope of Miss Senguin's speedy restoration. In the mean time, I will telegraph to London and make all necessary arrangements for my absence. I have already written to Mr. Senguin, and will send the letter by the early post. If you are writing, pray add force to my injunctions that he will refrain from exciting my patient by any attempt to see her."

Mr. Dormer readily promised, and Bramwell withdrew to his own room, where upon the table lay open the letter which, under the stress of Nadine's entreaties and the urgency of the situation, he had forced himself to write.

It ran thus:—

"Crozham. November 10th, 18—.

"MY DEAR MR. SENGUIN,

"I grieve to tell you that a shock to the nervous system, due, it may be supposed, to an accident which took place in the hunting-field before my arrival here yesterday, has produced in Miss Senguin symptoms of cerebral inflammation which gives

ground for grave anxiety, and demand the utmost care in her treatment, and in preserving the state of absolute quiet, upon which her safety mainly depends. Believe me that I sympathize deeply with the trouble of mind which this news will cause you ; but must earnestly entreat that you will *on no account* allow it to hurry you into a journey here, which, far from being of satisfaction to yourself or service to your daughter, could only increase your unhappiness, and would probably have the most injurious effect upon her state. My duty would compel me to forbid you access to her room, and any rumour of your presence in the house reaching her ears would probably rouse the excitement and agitation from which I am most anxious to guard her.

“ Pray rely upon my unremitting care, and be assured that you will be kept well informed as to Miss Senguin’s condition. I anticipate that if my directions are complied with, she will in a few days be out of danger, and I feel sure that I am only carrying out your wishes in taking upon myself the charge of her case, and have made such arrangements as will enable me to remain here as long as she requires constant attention.

“ I am, sincerely yours,

“ JULIAN BRAMWELL.”

CHAPTER III.

FAREWELL.

SOME two months later, Dr. Bramwell stood alone in the corridor of Mrs. Dormer's London house, listening with beating heart and mingled dread and anxiety for the sound of a footfall on the landing or the rustle of a dress upon the stair. The night before, he had received the following pencilled note from Nadine,—

"We are in London for a day or two on our way to Italy. I wish much to see you. Come to-morrow between three and four."

Against his better judgment, Bramwell was here in obedience to the summons. The dainty room, notwithstanding its velvet hangings, luxurious furniture, and the fire burning in the grate, struck him with a feeling of

chill and desolation. Without, a thick fog clung to the bare trees in the square; the pavement was wet; the houses opposite loomed dimly through mist; the street lamps burned dull; the cold was penetrating, and the gloom seemed palpable. A fit day upon which to bid Nadine farewell.

She was long in coming. Perhaps she too found the meeting difficult. Bramwell shivered, and, tired of waiting in suspense, began to pace nervously to and fro between the fire-place and the window. He regretted now that he had come. The horrible feeling of mockery which had of late so often occurred to him in connection with Nadine oppressed him heavily at this moment. It was, to use his own simile, like the contrast between a dead, distorted face and a wreath of summer flowers crowning its brow. Nadine, his ideal woman, had ceased to exist. In her stead, memory presented an image inspiring a joyless, hybrid feeling, in which blended compassion, yearning, and vague loathing. He rebuked himself sternly for having

yielded to her wish. Was he then but a weak coward—the slave of a woman's capricious impulses, without resolution to cut himself wholly adrift from her fate ; incapable of facing a dreary future, without pausing to cast a regretful look backward at the past, and chafing under the burden of a sacrifice which he had made fully counting the cost ?

He was thus taking himself to task when the door was softly opened, and Nadine entered.

Something in her appearance—he could scarcely tell whether it were due to the black dress she wore, to her chastened mien, or to the extreme fragility of her face and figure—quelled the tumult within his breast and deepened the sensation of pity, while for the moment it banished completely that of repulsion. He advanced and took her passive hand in his ; and as he did so, he marvelled at his own calmness. This very absence of compelling emotion made him realize the change in his mental attitude towards her.

The sadness of the inevitable weighed him down. Life seemed a gulf of horrible possibilities, in which, through the instrumentality of some malignant destiny against whose edicts it was vain to strive, the innocent were made guilty, the pure defiled.

Nadine met his pleading, sorrowful gaze for an instant, and a deep blush overspread her face; but it faded quickly, leaving her pale as snow. She motioned him to a seat, moving herself away to the window, and remaining there for a moment as though she were struggling to subdue her agitation. Presently she returned, and standing with her arms resting upon the back of a chair, said in pathetic tones that pierced his heart anew, while still they seemed to widen the spiritual distance between them,—

“I have grieved you very much. . . And now, I don’t want to make you more unhappy than I must do—I can see how you have suffered. And I too have suffered in a way that you could hardly understand. I do not expect that you will understand me. How

should you, when I am a mystery to myself? After I had sent for you I was sorry, for I thought that to see you would be too painful. . . But you will let it be as little painful as is possible. I could not go away for a long while without telling you—without saying—”

A sob rose ; she paused.

Bramwell had been sitting in an attitude of dejection, with head drooped and hands clasped between his knees. He spoke without lifting his eyes and in a constrained manner, which concealed how deeply he was moved.

“Do not tell me anything which it hurts you to say. There is no need. All my wish is that you should be spared in every way possible. There is so much suffering which is inevitable—which comes into our lot in spite of ourselves. The world is so full of it. . . . And you have had a long trial. It distresses me to see you looking still so pale and weak ; you are not fit to bear agitation. If, without entering into matters, you would rely upon me—would trust me to make what

arrangements I think best for your safety, your honour—much that troubles you at this moment would, I feel sure, be lifted from your mind. The future must appear to you a web of difficulties, immediate and distant. I cannot bear to think of you in your present state trying to cope with them. It would be wisest not to look forward. After a few years your position may be more independent. Let *me* provide for the present.”

Nadine fixed her eyes upon his face in mournful questioning, as though she longed with all her soul to follow his thoughts, yet could not by any possible effort discover their actual bent. The intensity of her gaze compelled his upward glance. She saw that the muscles of his face were quivering. Something in his eyes made the colour rise again to her cheek and brow. He seemed to divine and to answer her mute inquiry.

“Nadine,” he said, “this is our farewell. After to-day we shall meet no more—in the way that we have met hitherto. To touch hands in conventional intercourse with the

consciousness in our hearts of all that has passed would be too terrible; and any closer friendship between us is impossible."

Nadine bent her head downwards till it touched her clasped hands. Suddenly she lifted her face, and looking away from him, said in a tone of passionate defiance,—

"Why impossible? You judge by the world's standard, after all. Am I so lost, so degraded, that I am unworthy to be called your friend? Am I any worse now than when—when I confessed everything to you at Kensington House, and you said—you offered to make me your wife?"

He did not answer. There was a painful pause. She continued, her voice changed by tears, and gradually sinking to a whisper,—

"Will you desert me now, when my great need is over, and I ask only your pity and forbearance? I thought—I had been thinking—that by and by—after I have come back to England—though now I can hardly bear to meet your eyes—then we might be friends, and I might look to you for help

as to a brother; and your knowledge would be my safeguard—my preservation from the bad that is in me. . . . This is what I most dread—the evil which is growing in my nature, corrupting it, poisoning all good impulses. There are horrible thoughts in my mind, sometimes they are more than I can endure, and I feel as though I must shriek or laugh, or prick myself with pins, anything to escape from them—the old thoughts—the old terror of myself. You see I must tell you everything, even though it should make you turn from me. . . . At first, when all was over, there was an intense relief as of awakening from a dreadful nightmare; and I could only say to myself, ‘I am saved,’ and I could have gone on my knees and kissed your feet in my gratitude and thankfulness. But now that is past, and I cannot rest; I cannot breathe. There is a fire within me, a craving for excitement, a longing to act some new part, and always beside me an invisible demon whispering loathsome suggestions, crimes, horrors. . . . I have impulses

to tell lies—cold, snake-like impulses—and the wish to destroy. There's no soft feeling in me, nothing womanly; no natural affection—only cruel hatred, and longing to get my own will, and to gain power, and to make others suffer."

He checked her by a sudden exclamation.

"I beseech you," he said in a shaken voice, "do not dwell upon these fancies. The very speaking of them strengthens their hold upon you. How can I convince you that they are utterly morbid and due entirely to your physical state?"

She shook her head.

"No, you must hear me out. There's something else I must say to you. I sent for you to-day to tell you." She leaned over to him and went on in a whisper. "*The little child* . . . you know. I hated it from the first. I could not bear to see it. And now, though it is away from me, the hatred is stronger than ever. . . . I have a fancy sometimes that I hear it crying—and then it is as though a wild wicked spirit came

into me and prompted me to take it away and drown it in some deep pool, where its crying could never more be heard."

She shivered. He touched her hand; it was very cold. Mechanically he chafed it between his own; the action seemed to comfort her.

"This is not delirium?" she said, questioningly; "all that is past. I am quite well now."

He released her hand with a gesture of denial.

"You are far from well. I am deeply thankful that your father has decided upon leaving England. Your nerves are utterly unhinged, and if you remained here I should fear that you might have a serious illness."

She went on, following the former thread of thought,—

"I am afraid of what I might do. Sometimes the horror comes over me that if— Everything would be so easy if I knew where it was. I don't want to know. I want to be kept from it."

"You shall not know," said Bramwell earnestly. "You shall know nothing. And now you have told me what was in your mind, try to feel as though you had confessed to a priest and had received absolution. Try to think, now at least, that you have no burden—that I have taken it from you."

"It is for this that I have decided upon spending the next few years abroad," said Nadine, speaking with agitated hurry. "I wish to leave the past behind me. I wish to begin life anew—unshackled. And how could I do so with this hateful consciousness, this miserable weight always dragging me down. You *must* help me to escape from it. Where else would be the use of all you have done for me? . . . And when I come home again everything may be different. *I* may be different. But if you forsake me—you do not know how in my thoughts I have clung to you—I shall grow wicked—mad. I shall become callous—and then there will be no hope for me. . . ."

As she ceased speaking she lifted her arms

and let them fall despairingly, remaining a motionless figure, with parted lips and dilated eyes.

Bramwell rose and walked away a few paces. His former mood had been shaken. There was now no repulsion in his mind. In her power of swaying the emotions of those with whom she was brought into relation lay the secret of Nadine's witchery. It seemed to Bramwell that she was less the victim of temptation, to which her own propensities placed her in subjection, than of a cruel fate, which had compelled circumstance. He stood battling with the storm of passion that swept him, as his thoughts turned to the dead man who had wrought this evil; and he clenched his hands in impotent rage and despair when he compared the miserable woman before him with the bright creature of a year back, who had travelled so swiftly from fearless girlhood to this region of tragic horror.

When he returned he saw that she had changed her position; and, with her hands clasped before her face, was crouching against the arm of a sofa.

"You must not give way to these feelings," he said in deep, passionate tones. "You *must not! you must not!* Try to look upon them as a form of disease, not as the outcome of your real nature. Your existence has been shaken, as it were, to its core. Your whole being has been paralyzed by the most terrible of experiences, and you have passed a crisis which might well have unhinged the strongest brain. I have great hope in the effect upon you of new scenes and fresh occupations. Soon there will be nothing in your surroundings to recall the past; gradually these miserable fancies which torture you now will leave you; and as you grow stronger your mind will regain its original balance. Your trouble has come to you in youth; and though its effect must always remain, its worst bitterness will pass away. But this constant self-analysis and morbid introspection can only do you harm. Put forth all your strength and courage to face the demons you dread, and to keep them at arm's length. Encourage all occupation which

tends to moral health. Live, but do not think. Interest yourself in abstract things, in books, music, art. Try to cultivate some pursuit which will enlarge your sympathies and lift you above melancholy brooding. Above all, cultivate human affection, not in the sense of love, but the affection of ordinary daily life. This will be your truest safeguard—" He paused, and added with a bitter, impatient gesture—"I am talking to you like a priest. My words seem to myself now utter mockery, unmeaning platitudes. I dare say they seem so to you. But perhaps you will think of them by and by, and they may do you good."

"You do not understand," answered Nadine wearily, letting her hands fall upon her lap. "None of these things would ever take any hold upon me. I cannot be fond of people; it is not my nature. The feeling of pleasure in being admired is all that I have ever known of affection—except in two instances—"

She was silent; her face softened; her eyes seemed to lose themselves in backward visions.

"I have *loved* one person only in the world. Ah me! *That* fire is burned out for ever. . . . And I have cared—I do care—for *you*. You are all that is left me now—yet you will forsake me."

"Nadine," cried Bramwell, urged beyond all power of self-restraint, "you ask too much of me. You ask more than human nature is capable of. To act a lie for your sake; to save you at the peril of my professional reputation; to guard you from disgrace; to take upon my shoulders the burden you fling aside—this I have done and will do faithfully. But to be your friend and companion; to listen to your confidences and self-upbraidings; to watch you play your part in society, as you can so well play it; to prescribe for your mental health, knowing your secret; to feel my love for you intensifying daily to madness, realizing even more strongly that there lies between us a gulf that cannot be passed—this is more than I could bear."

Nadine bent towards him, smiling with ineffable sweetness.

"Then you love me," she whispered softly—
"*still?*"

"Why will you torture me?" cried Bramwell passionately. "No; I do not love you—not as I once did. I don't know what I feel. I cannot understand myself. A blight has fallen upon me; life is sickening. I am more wretched than words can express. To me this condition is moral death, and my only hope lies in shunning you."

"Do not reproach me," said Nadine. "Remember that from the first I bade you leave me. Remember that when you offered to make me your wife, knowing all, I refused to accept the sacrifice. . . . You do not love me—is this so?"

She placed her hand upon his arm and forced his miserable eyes to meet hers, which were melting with womanly softness.

"Nadine," he cried, and held out his arms.

But she repulsed him gently and drew back.

"No," she said sadly; "there shall at

least be one crime with which you will have no cause to reproach me. Think, if it will lighten your pain, that at the last I was touched by your goodness, your nobility, and that I regretted—that if I could, I would have made you happy. Think of me as the old impulsive Nadine, who knew herself, but who for once did not yield to an impulse which would bring you sorrow ; for we should only bring each other sorrow, of that I am sure in my heart. Though I cling to you, for I cannot bear to let you go, I know that we are best apart. I must go my way ; I must fulfil my bent. You remember what I said always—‘ My nature is my destiny.’ You in time might become a shackle that I should hate.”

“ Nadine,” said Bramwell hoarsely, “ let this be a new birth, as it were, a baptism in which you will be cleansed from all former associations. If you would accept and *believe* in your capacity for goodness—if you would make that belief a starting point— Nadine, I have faith in your youth—I have faith in the

power of time. It is best that we should be apart. But our hearts and minds may grow more purely towards each other. . . . If it is ever any comfort to you to write to me you will do so?"

"Yes," said Nadine, in a mechanical manner, "I will write sometimes. But it will not comfort me for long. We shall drift further and further away from each other. . . . I shall grow hard, as I said, and then writing to you will be of no use—nothing will be of any use."

She had risen; and he too stood up, clasping both her hands. At the sight of his sorrowful eyes, big with tears, a pang of sorrow and remorse pierced her, and she added tremulously—

"I grieve you, and I am not worth grieving for. I have done you nothing but harm. I have spoiled your life. . . . I have caused you the worst pain. . . . And now, what can I do to atone?—nothing, nothing. I will try, indeed I will try, to be better—for your sake."

Bramwell could not speak. The anguish of the moment was intolerable. He lifted Nadine's hands and held them against his breast; then stooped forward and kissed her cheek.

Tears fell from Nadine's eyes, and repressed sobs shook her frame. He loosed her hands, and she sank back upon the couch, burying her face in the cushions.

"I can't—say—any more," she murmured brokenly. "I said—that I would try. I will be better. You have been very good to me. I do not see now how you can ever feel anything but regret for having known me—but perhaps some day you may be less sorry."

He left her without another word.

BOOK VI.

LETTER I.

FROM NADINE SENGUIN TO DR. BRAMWELL.

" Villa Alexia, Nice,

" January 18th, 18—

"It is two years since I have written to you. I could not answer your last letter. There was in its tone an indefinable something which told me that it had cost you an effort to write. Is not this true?—and the solicitude which you expressed for me was so out of harmony with my mood and my manner of life, that it irritated instead of softening me, and goaded me to excitement as a stronghold from thought.

"Did I not say that this would be the case; and that as time went on, and I grew harder and colder, we should, in a spiritual sense, drift further and further apart? You will gradually get to think my reliance upon you a distasteful burden, and I shall feel less and less the need of you.

"But to-night I have a powerful impulse towards you. The sense of your presence is so strong within me, that once or twice I had almost turned in the expectation of meeting your sad eyes. Strange, if after all I should be more faithful to my sentiment for you than you to yours for me! Is not there some spiritual sort of electricity which upon occasions forces souls to speak to each other through darkness and space?

"Not that for me there is at this moment any tragic necessity for such communion. I hardly know what has turned my thoughts towards you so vividly, unless it be that you formed the subject of conversation with some people in whose company I dined this evening. Their name is Blundell. They are mother and daughter, and appear to know you intimately. I wonder if you are deeply interested in them. I wonder if the mother deceives you into believing her true; we false women have intuitions concerning each other, and they are generally correct. I wonder— Something that was said this evening set my mind working. Mrs. Blundell is a woman of the world—the world of Monte Carlo. This means that she is an inveterate gambler, of straitened means, who, with an affected devotion to her daughter, would sell

her to the highest bidder. The girl is lovely, sweet, and gentle. Her face brightened strangely as we walked in the garden after dinner and talked—of you. It pleased me to lead her on. I wanted to hear of your success, of your mode of life. I wanted to try and glean whether you had changed. Perhaps there was a little womanly pique, a taint of jealousy at the bottom of my interest. Do you recognize Nadine? *Have* you changed? Do you ever think of marrying, or are you still wedded to science—or to memory?

“Men have less to repine at in their lot than we women in ours. To you love and marriage are mere episodes; to us they are the supreme crisis, the refuge from dissatisfaction and despair, the passport to independence, the means to some definite aim in life. Ah me! do you recollect the advice you urged upon me when we said farewell to each other three years ago? You bade me cultivate a healthy interest in abstract things—in books, music, art, above all, to cultivate affection. You said that I might think of your words some day. I have often thought of them, and of many others that you have spoken. But I have profited nothing by your counsel. Books have meant for me only self-loathing, the hateful

presentment of my own mood and passions; music, indefinable sadness, from which I would fain escape; art, the conventional jargon of a certain school—false, narrow rules applied to drapery and colouring, afternoon teas in æsthetic studios at Rome and Florence; and affection! vanity, display, greed for power, and sordid effort to outvie other women in the number of my admirers, or by the achievement of a brilliant marriage.

“It is a relief to me to open my heart in this vague way; and you will understand my impulsive candour, and will take it for what it is—the fancy of the hour. You perhaps alone can realize the moral nausea which at times even still overpowers me. It comes over me at moments when I appear in the gayest spirits; when I am dancing, dressing, driving, when men are paying court to me; and for the moment I feel miserable enough to go forth and drown myself, like the lost wretch that I am. But this sickening feeling does not last long; and for the keen pain which I once endured excitement has proved an effectual anodyne. I have no capacity for pain now save of the egoistic kind, nor am I tortured any longer by a sense of inward conflict.’ The seven devils have entered victoriously in and hold the

sanctuary. Who shall cast them forth? Even you, in your deepest and most earnest mood, would have no power to awaken in me emotion of any nobler kind than that artificial sentimentality which fashion prescribes as becoming to a pair of intense eyes and a Burne Jones type of countenance.

"Do you know that restless stirring of the soul, that craving for sympathy which constrains us imperiously, even when we are most self-contained, and believe ourselves most entirely self-sufficing?

"I paused here. It is a wild night. The mistral is blowing, and the surf is beating on the shore. To me it feels oppressively sultry. I have been wandering in the garden among the eucalyptus trees and the fragrant yellow laden mimosa shrubs. Are you fond of this place? Can you conceive the infinite beauty of this landscape, and the sweetness and loneliness of such a southern night—the open stretch of sea gleaming pale beneath a watery moon; the dim background of hills; and the distant, steadfast light of the beacon at Antibes, which in some strange way brings to the heart a sense of rest and anchorage; the murmuring of insects and whispering of the

eucalyptus leaves; the perfume of flowers and indescribable freshness of the atmosphere? We are fools to seek sympathy from humanity when nature has such wealth to offer; but in the case of temperaments like mine—restless, capricious, tumultuous to-day, composed to-morrow, at peace never—nature has less power to soothe than the garish scenes in which I have of late taken part.

“I am quieter. The air has done me good; my head aches less wearily. And now, my friend,—may I not call you so upon this page?—I have news for you. To-night I have decided my destiny.

“Congratulate me. It promises at least to be brilliant—one upon which Mammon must smile; and though angels may weep, the hosts of earth and hell will applaud.

“What are the good things which mothers of the world covet most earnestly for their daughters, and that women such as I yearn after? A title, a vast rent-roll, a lineage almost royal, palaces, equipages, diamonds that a queen might envy, a life of luxury and constant excitement—and all burdened with but the honourable condition—marriage.

“Well, this evening I consented to become the wife of Prince Nicolaivitch Titchakoff.

' "You may have heard his name. Do you know that it ranks but little lower than that of the Imperial House? Do you know that his wealth is almost fabulous; that he has territories in Russia, a palace in Rome, a villa in Cannes, an hotel in Paris, an estate in Warwickshire inherited from his mother, who was an English heiress, a Scotch forest, and a mansion in Park Lane; that his jewels are world-renowned; that his taste is considered the most fastidious in Europe; that his manners are exquisite; that for years he has been the despair of chaperones, and that court beauties have sighed at his feet in vain? Could the soul of woman desire more? What matter that he has been twice married; that he is of middle age; that he has the reputation of a Bluebeard and a voluptuary; that mystery surrounds him; that he is called cruel and cold-blooded, and is said to have a passion for dangerous excitement and political intrigue; that there are in his castle locked chambers to which the outside world may not penetrate?

"Oh, for any source of excitement which should make life seem momentous! Are there not in my castle locked chambers also?

"Ah! in these days of cheap cynicism and

difficult morality, when life is like a solemn farce enacted behind the footlights to an appropriate orchestral accompaniment, it is so easy to talk and write flippantly; but the drop scene must fall sometimes; and there are interludes in the drama when memory awakes with tears, and the heart communes silently with its own bitterness.

"In obedience to the higher law which imposes an especial creed upon the Princesses Titchakoff, I enter, upon my marriage, into the Greek Church. It is expedient that one should bow in the house of Rimmon; and of what importance can a slight change of ritual be to me, for whom the name of God bears little or no meaning?

"If it were otherwise—if I could feel any confident anticipation of a future in which the errors of this world might be repaired and its sins atoned for—I might perhaps struggle towards a different future. But my religion is dead, and it is you, strangely enough, who have killed it—you who at one time stirred all the impulses towards higher living which lay in my nature.

"This being so, why should I strive after a vain ideal, an impossible duty? Life being all that I have, why should I not clutch at the best which it can give? why not halt at

every green place that presents itself in this dreary desert?

“Farewell, my friend. This is indeed farewell. Henceforth you and I can have no interest in common.

“NADINE.”

The letter enclosed a cheque for a large sum drawn in favour of Dr. Bramwell for the benefit of his ward, Evelyn Gage.

LETTER II.

*Written some three years after the marriage
of Nadine Senguin to Prince Titchakoff.*

FROM DR. BRAMWELL TO MRS. BLUNDELL.

"Great Cumberland Place,

"June 12th, 18—

"MY DEAR MRS. BLUNDELL,

"I am deeply sorry that you renew in your letter, which I have just received, your refusal to let me see your daughter, and in person press my suit.

"I was under the impression, after our interview yesterday, that your confidence in me had been restored, and that I had sufficiently relieved your mind upon the subject of certain circumstances in my life which appear to have awakened your distrust. I can only again solemnly assure you that, unworthy as I in many ways feel myself of the love of a girl sweet and innocent as your Margaret, there is no reason such as you hint at to debar me from asking her to be my wife, or

from honourably introducing her under the same roof with my ward, Evelyn Gage.

"I gather from your letter, that remarks incautiously dropped by Mrs. Gaythorne have re-aroused your suspicions as to my relationship to Evelyn. I do not deny that the child's parentage is a secret which I am pledged not to divulge; but I do distinctly deny that I am her father, or that I have been actuated by any but the purest motives in becoming her guardian.

"You state positively that this denial does not remove your scruples or induce you to consent that I should pay my addresses to your daughter. Forgive me for venturing to express a doubt whether, in the case of a suitor more highly placed in the scale of society than I, these delicate scruples would be so firmly put forward. I can well understand your wish that Margaret should marry a man younger, richer, less absorbed in grave pursuits, and of higher rank than myself—all these disadvantages I feel strongly; but, and I write in all humility, I question greatly whether any other marriage would equally promote her happiness.

"You know that I should never have been emboldened to speak but for the revelation of feeling which in her delirium Margaret so

innocently made. Even then I hesitated, and the time when I avoided going to your house was passed in convincing myself that I should be doing her no wrong in making her my wife. I do not wish to conceal from you that my earlier life was sacrificed to a hopeless infatuation, and that the love which I have now to offer is not the passion of youth, but the earnest affection of a prematurely aged and somewhat disappointed man, who feels that the tenderest care and devotion is inadequate for the priceless treasure of such a heart as Margaret's.

"But these I offer in the deepest reverence and sincerity, and with no shadow of shame. Since you *demand* the full disclosure of Evelyn's parentage, I will if possible satisfy you, and will try to obtain a release from my vow of silence. But if this is denied me, though I have little hope that Margaret will ever act in defiance of your influence, I claim it as my right that she shall be permitted to hear my pleading and herself decide my fate.

"I am,

"Sincerely yours,

"JULIAN BRAMWELL."

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

A DAUGHTER OF MAMMON.

IN the boudoir of one of the larger houses in Park Lane the Princess Titchakoff and her friend Margaret Blundell were seated, engaged in intimate conversation.

If misery still dogged Nadine, and life yet appeared to her no more than a hollow farce, her beauty showed no sign of deterioration; and only her eyes spoke of weariness and dissatisfaction with her lot. Her complexion exhibited a more delicate bloom than even of old; in her gestures there was the same languid vivacity; her lips seemed to have been trained to smiles; and though in her features and mien the expression of

forced sweetness and of conscious power had perhaps deepened to artificiality, it did not detract from the fascination which must always be her ruling characteristic.

A more decided contrast to the Princess's beauty than that of her companion could hardly be imagined. The madonna-like loveliness of Margaret Blundell's face, though it would have shown to greater advantage upon a form less slight and more perfectly moulded, might have gained for her a perhaps purer admiration and more lasting influence than that which Nadine inspired. Her large grey eyes shone with a light that seemed more of heaven than of earth; her lips and brow bore the stamp of tender sincerity and confiding innocence; her whole presence breathed womanliness; and if the curves of her mouth and chin faintly suggested irresolution and undue susceptibility to the influence of affection, the fault was amply redeemed by the angelic sweetness of her glance and the noble pose of her head.

She was seated now in a low chair by

the Princess's side, and in a caressing manner was stroking the hand of her friend. There was something childlike and singularly engaging in all her actions.

"Dear Princess," she said affectionately, "you are certainly thinner than you used to be in Rome, and there are darker shadows under your eyes. Are you quite well?"

"Quite well, little one," answered Nadine listlessly; "but we stayed in Paris on our way here, and late hours tell upon me a little. Perfect health is the curse of narrow lives like mine. Think what a fund of excitement I might find in studying my various symptoms, and experimentalizing with quack medicines upon my nervous system. I was reading in some book the other day that, apart from dress, society, and lovers, the only things which vitally affect fashionable women are spiritualism and the confessional. A chronic malady is worth all these distractions of the flesh and the devil."

"You call your life narrow," said Margaret. "I should have imagined it a ceaseless round

of amusement and occupation ; and yet—" she hesitated slightly—"I have noticed that, in spite of your gaiety, you always seem sad. Is it that vague melancholy, I wonder, which makes you so attractive ? Why are we always most charmed by that which is saddest ? Does nothing interest you, Princess ? "

"Yes, a thousand things—as much as blowing bubbles in the air and watching them burst."

Nadine paused and leaned forward, resting her chin upon her hand ; then lifting her head impatiently, she continued, with that curious impulsiveness which often showed itself in strong contrast with the usual indifferent reserve of her manner—

"Frankly, I need a big excitement to stir my blood. Gambling would perhaps drag me out of myself if it were not a matter of supreme unimportance whether I should win or lose. One must have staked one's all before passion can be roused or an issue seem momentous, and then—then. . . . In order that one's faculties should be completely

absorbed, desperation must be the goad to interest ; honour, position, life must rest upon the fall of the card. . . Oh, that I had lived in the old days when the world was not too enlightened for enthusiasm : I could have led a forlorn hope, or struck a fell blow for my country's freedom. I could have been a Judith, a Catherine of Russia, a Charlotte Corday. But in these days, when ambition means for women degrading intrigue, treachery, conspiracy, dynamite, we had better all be patient Grizzels or frivolous puppets."

Margaret looked bewildered.

"I am surprised, Princess," she said, "to hear you speak so scornfully of political movements. At Rome I have seen you kindle with excitement when you discussed these matters with the statesmen and authors and leaders of great causes who assembled in your salon. It fascinated me to watch your face when you mourned the oppressions of Italy and of Russia. And it is said that Prince Titchakoff is so keenly interested in the troubles of his country."

Nadine started, and eyed the young girl keenly.

"Well, perhaps some day you may hear that I have plunged into—what shall I say?—the whirlpool of Nihilism as a refuge from ennui. But tell me of yourself, Margaret. What have you been doing during the last two years? It is strange that we did not meet abroad during the winter. Does your mother still take annual flight with the swallows? and do you submit as patiently as ever to being dragged the weary round which fashion ordains for a young lady who wishes to achieve a decent settlement in life?"

"Princess, you make me unhappy when you speak so cynically. It *is* a weary round. I detest it. But though you say that the world has grown supine, and that there is no nobility in men, surely we know some lives which are devoted to ennobling pursuits—to science, the benefit of humanity. How blessed a woman might feel herself if it were her privilege to merge her existence in one of these."

Margaret's voice trembled, and a vivid blush overspread her cheeks. The Princess raised the girl's face, and forced the grey eyes to meet her own.

"*Science!*" she repeated in a tone of mournful raillery. "In that word lies the key to your discontent with woman's ordinary lot. Margaret, do you remember *who* we talked of most the evening that I first met you at Nice?"

"You bewitched me then, Princess," murmured Margaret. "And at Rome I felt all the time that, half against my will, you were worming my secrets out of me. But I had no secrets that I was ashamed of. I have none now."

"Women are only ashamed to own that they love when they love unworthily," said Nadine.

"Ah, Princess!" exclaimed Margaret, "there spoke the nobility of your nature. But you have not quite understood me. It was not *love*," she added hesitatingly. "It was pity, admiration, reverence—the feeling

which an ignorant child may have for one older, sadder, wiser, and infinitely better than herself."

"And since that time the child's feeling has ripened into the woman's affection? . . . And it is returned?"

"Do not ask me. Indeed I cannot tell you."

"I *must* know," said Nadine imperiously. "Confide in me freely. I—I am interested in you and in him. Speak, Margaret. Has he asked you to be his wife?"

"No—that is—he—"

"But you are certain that he loves you?"

"No—yes," faltered Margaret; "not in *that* way. Princess, you do not understand. Marriage was not in my thoughts. How should it have been? He always seemed to me a man set apart—by his love for his profession—by some sorrow which I felt must have overshadowed his early life. His friendship—to be allowed to sympathize with his aims—to have the joy of knowing that there lives in the world at least one man absolutely truthful, unselfish, and loyal—seems to me

sufficient to make life happy. Were it not for that complete faith in him and in the purity of my feeling, I could blush when I think of— I was very ill, Princess, in the winter. I had a fever; and I fear—I have never dared to ask my mother whether in my delirium I betrayed how deep is my feeling for him. But he would not misconstrue words spoken so innocently. That is my comfort. . . . He was very good to me while I was weak and suffering, more tender to me than even my mother, if that could be possible. And when I began to get better, and was feverish and restless, he was so patient—so pitiful. He would sit looking at me with sad, earnest eyes; his face so grave, but oh! so kind; and once—he bent over me and kissed my forehead, and bade me grow strong for his sake. I was very happy. It was like the revelation of something I had dreamed, but had never dared picture to myself. Then for a long time he did not come to see me, and I was afraid lest perhaps I had grieved him. . . . But last week we

might be excitement in giving play to despicable passions, even if she were actuated alone by selfish greed of power. That sort of distraction would be her moral opium."

Nadine rose hurriedly and walked towards a pier-glass, where she stood apparently lost in contemplation of her own beauty. Margaret could not see her face, but silently watched her attitude with eyes in which bewilderment mingled with fascination.

Suddenly Nadine turned, and exclaimed impulsively,—

"There are people who rouse in me all that is at once best and worst."

As she spoke the door opened, and a servant came in bearing a card upon a salver.

The Princess glanced at it, and ordered that the visitor should be admitted.

"Margaret," she said calmly, "an old friend has come to call upon me. You will be surprised to hear that it is Dr. Bramwell."

Margaret started to her feet in a state of painful confusion.

"Princess, I cannot see him now. Let me leave you before he enters."

"Too late," said Nadine imperiously; "but you may go presently if you will. Better do so," she added with a forced laugh; "your presence might be a check upon confidences. It is a drawing-room drama, full of curious situations. This is a scene for which we ought to pose theatrically."

She approached Margaret, but the latter drew back.

"Princess, your manner is so strange. You almost make me fancy that——"

She paused abruptly. Dr. Bramwell was announced.

A swift, indefinable change swept over Nadine's features. It might have been likened to that sudden subsidence of irritation which takes place in a certain species of serpent the moment before it makes the fatal spring. Her lips parted in a winning smile, her eyes beamed alluringly, the muscles about her mouth relaxed, and dimples came into play. She extended her hand in a gesture

of the most perfect grace and courtesy, with which there yet blended the faint reflection of her old thirst for admiration.

For a second Bramwell stood, his gaze rivetted upon her face. A little extra paleness, and the tension of his brow and nostrils were the only signs which betrayed inward agitation. But these were clearly perceived by Nadine. Triumphant resolve took possession of her; it was like the whetting of a keen and dangerous weapon. As he took her hand their eyes met, and mutual consciousness seemed to establish a magnetic current between them. The old dynamic force of her look asserted itself irresistibly. Why should he struggle against a fascination stronger than his will? All thoughts of his later love were for the moment swept away. His pulses throbbed wildly. . . . Was not this Nadine—the dream of his youth, the only woman whose glance had ever stirred his blood to madness; about whose very name there yet clung a subtle magic; whose smile and touch had still the power to

intoxicate; whose tones thrilled his being as the echo of a war-song, which had once moved a nation to revolt, might set the nerves of a patriot quivering long after the passionate struggle was ended?

"Dr. Bramwell," said the Princess, "this is indeed a pleasure. In the years that have passed since we were friends—at Alston—I have thought of you many times, and have rejoiced to hear of the fame that you have won. My father remembered you till the last, and spoke often gratefully of your care and kindness in the old days. But—it is so long since I have heard from you—I feared that you had forgotten me, and that we were never to meet again."

"With what platitude can I answer you, Princess?" said Bramwell, recovering himself. "Shall I say that to forget you would be an impossibility? Our lives have lain apart."

"True. I have been so little in England of late years. And our paths are likely to be still more widely separated if my husband

carries out his threatened intention of taking me to Russia. But there *has* been a link between us, Dr. Bramwell. In Rome, two winters ago, Miss Blundell and I often talked of you. Indeed, the mention of your name first created a bond of sympathy between us. Was it not so, Margaret?"

Bramwell started as his eyes followed those of the Princess and rested upon Margaret Blundell, who, her head bent in ostensible examination of a water-colour sketch, was standing at a table some little distance apart. Her presence intensified the conflict of emotions which his meeting with Nadine had aroused, and plunged him into a state of consciousness at once keen and unreal—so often the accompaniment of a vivid dream that all the time we are aware is only a dream. Had he not often in the night watches pictured himself face to face with these two women—Nadine the enchantress, Margaret the pure, the dove-eyed, who, could he shake himself free from the old witchery, might be the lamp of his home, the sustaining joy of his life,

Though he felt in a vague manner that the crisis was momentous, he was yet wholly incapable of realizing the full tragic import of the situation. The drama was inward; its issue depended upon himself; his own nature was the arbiter of his fate. Swift images in connection with Nadine, of rapture, doubt, despair, repulsion, succeeded each other in his mind, and with them in some dim way blended an intuition of need on her part.

If she required him, could he desert her?

The dream-like sense deepened. He had a feeling, bewildering yet not painful, of being borne on without any consciousness of volition, and of watching his life outside him, having no power to regulate it. And with the wonderful contradictoriness of human nature he experienced for the moment a distinct satisfaction in this inability to sway his mood. It lulled the pangs of compunction and relieved the pressure of responsibility.

But Margaret's pure eyes as they met his infused new strength into his soul. The fresh emotions which her influence sent

streaming through his being were like the beginning of another existence—an existence in which Nadine must always stand apart, solitary—invested with a glamour that could never in his eyes enshrine another woman; but, most of all, apart from that one with whom his own lot would be blended in a blessedness that yet must ever be half mournful.

Margaret's touch when she mechanically returned his greeting seemed to him that of a miraculous hand. He felt that the crisis had passed, and saw his fate decided—but saw it through a vista of present pain.

Margaret advanced in an agitated manner towards Nadine.

“Princess,” she said tremulously, “it is time that I went away. I will bid you good-bye.”

Nadine drew the young girl to her side and kissed her lips. At the contact Margaret recoiled ever so slightly, and Nadine's eyes met those of Bramwell for an instant, flashing at him a glance of passionate inquiry.

“Good-bye,” said the Princess; “but not

for long. In a few days we shall meet again."

Bramwell held open the door as Margaret passed through. Their hands and eyes met again. In her look there was holy trust; in his mournful entreaty.

"I shall see you very soon," he whispered.

His gaze followed her till she had disappeared from the outer room.

CHAPTER II.

THE WEAPON TURNED.

WHEN Bramwell turned he saw that Nadine was still standing. She took his hand, and with a gesture inexpressibly winning motioned him to a chair. Then sinking upon a low settee by his side she leaned forward, and resting her chin upon her hand. gazed at him earnestly.

“And now, old friend,” she said—and who but Nadine had at command tones so thrilling?—“tell me—have I changed?”

“Changed! *You!* How, Princess?” he stammered.

“Do not call me ‘*Princess,*’” she exclaimed with mournful imperiousness, scornfully accentuating the word. “Can I not forget what I am, if only for an hour? Let me be

Nadine—the Nadine of Alston, the Nadine whom you once *loved*.”

Their eyes met. Hers had grown larger in their intensity, and were melting with tenderness. She had suffered her voice to drop almost to a whisper. Her accent conveyed maddening possibilities, the thought of which, against will and judgment, fired his blood. He could have flung himself at her feet, clasping her hands. . . . But Margaret’s presence still haunted the room; the remembrance of Margaret’s touch, like that of a guardian spirit, restrained him from impetuous avowal, which a second later must have turned to bitter self-upbraiding. Nadine watched the struggle. . . . At last she saw his face set into sorrowful sternness, almost despairing resolution. With consummate tact, allowing him no time to reply, she continued,—

“I dream impossibilities. Nadine is no more. The Princess Titchakoff reigns in her stead—reigns, suffers, weeps. . . . Ah, me! But dreaming is pleasant; and I have a

means which is very simple, very painless, for escaping to another world when I am weary of this. Sometimes in my fancy I paint my lot as it might have been—a lot wedded to high purposes, warmed by unselfish devotion, in which the faint germ of nobility that lay in me might have been converted by the faith and encouragement of another into a sustaining principle. . . . *Träumerei!* Ah, do you remember? Do you remember the drawing-room at Alston, the dim light, the scent of the *potpourri*, the quaint, carved chairs, and the old man leaning back, with the firelight upon his face, making it glorious? Even he has gone from me. In all these years I have had but one friend, which has been a refuge from self, which has comforted me in hours of misery, which has made memory reality.”

“Who? *What?*” asked Bramwell eagerly, a chill fear striking him.

“You are so wise in your craft, and yet you cannot read my face? But you used to say that when *I* was in question you were but a

poor physician. . . . Nay, ask me no more. Let us imagine that we are in the drawing-room at Alston. Shall I play to you again? ”

She rose abruptly and moved to the open piano opposite. For some minutes her fingers wandered among the keys, breathing the old plaintive harmonies that had echoed so many times in his dreams. Present thoughts and past moods seemed to take form and troop in poetic images, phantasmagoria-fashion, before him, saddening, yet at the same time thrilling him with suggestions of what might have been. Suddenly Nadine struck a minor accompaniment, and sang with indescribable pathos the following sonnet,—

“ What’s the best thing in the world ?
June rose by May dew impearled ;
Sweet south wind that means no rain ;
Truth not cruel to a friend :
Pleasure not in haste to end ;
Beauty not self-decked and curled
Till its pride is over plain :
Light that never makes you wink ;
Memory that gives no pain ;
Love—when *so* you’ve loved again.
What’s the best thing in the world ?
Something out of it, I think.”

Her voice trembled ; her hands fell upon her lap, and she sat for a moment quite still. Then returning to her seat, she cast herself back against the cushions in an attitude of weariness and *abandon*. Her bosom heaved gently. Tears beaded her drooping lashes. He saw that she was hardly mistress of herself.

The spell of the music still held Bramwell in thrall. He stooped over her.

"Nadine," he said in a voice of anguish. "It breaks my heart to see you so unhappy."

Nadine did not answer at once. Their looks clung to each other, and the sadness of her face was intensified in his. She smiled strangely and shook her head.

"I am not often like this—only sometimes, when I am alone and unnerved. . . . Still impulsive, you see, still emotional, still double in nature, still compelled to sincerity—by *you*. . . . I am not so greatly changed. Unhappy!" she exclaimed impetuously. "Ah! if you could but know the wretched-

ness, the sickening disgust that lies beneath this mask of prosperity. There are things in my life which I would tell you if I could. But I cannot—I dare not. . . . Picture me—Nadine, who was once so proud, so self-confident—a victim, a tool, a slave to jealousy, tyranny that I loathe, smiled upon in society, giped at, threatened, insulted at home, treading always upon a mine which at any moment may explode and destroy me.”

“Nadine,” cried Bramwell, startled, “it is difficult to understand what you mean. It is more than hard to know that I cannot help you. I can only imagine vaguely what your life is. . . . I have heard rumours. Your husband is perhaps involved in the great political movements abroad. You shrink from possible consequences—”

“No, not alone that,” answered Nadine recklessly. “There would be excitement in danger if only I could feel that for me there were any vital interest at stake. But all is empty and barren. What is it to me if an emperor lives or dies, if a few human lives

more or less are sacrificed? I have no large abstract sympathies, no deep passions. I thought once that I could find satisfaction in the gratification of vanity and ambition. I was mistaken. I have tried—yes, let me confess it—to lower myself to coarse pleasures. I cannot; and sometimes,” she added with a bitter laugh, “I am tempted, like Madame de Sevigné, to regret that I am so cold. There are no sources of distraction for me. But it is like the old days to see your face sadden while I talk of what is in my mind. And I was selfish always in grieving you. I have not yet lost the power of causing you pain.”

“Nadine,” said Bramwell impulsively, “*you* are the abiding wretchedness of my life.”

She raised herself and leaned towards him, her face upturned to his.

“*Must* I be so—always? I want to tell you something. You remember when we parted. You might have made me what you pleased if you had not chosen to forsake

me. If I had thought less of you and more of myself—”

He interrupted her by a passionate gesture. She drew back and watched him anxiously, waiting for him to speak. His attitude—that habitual to him when deeply moved or in inward debate, of head bent forward, face lowered, and hands tightly clasped together—told her that he was struggling with either impulse or agitation. She saw that the muscles of his forehead were contracted, and that his lips were sternly locked. . . . How long he remained silent! . . . Would he never look at her?

The silence continued, to Bramwell made momentous by the pressure of mysterious necessity, growing every instant more imperative. The feeling of unreality and of being hurried onward by forces beyond his control had left him. His mind was vividly alert, capable even of self-analysis; and though the rapid probing of his inmost feelings inflicted the keenest suffering, he was in that state of mixed, remorseful consciousness when

pain as the consequence—nay, even the justification of definite resolve—seemed welcome. He had at this moment none of the passionate impulse of a lover towards Nadine, but only aching anxiety and pitiful yearning—something also of the despairing self-reproach which a rescued man might feel who, faint and helpless, is compelled to watch from the shore the drowning agonies of a late companion for whom there is no possibility of aid.

But predominant in the rush of emotions that swept his being was the sense of yearning and devotion towards Margaret—an aim glowing starlike in the future, a salvation that reconciled him to the present inevitable anguish.

For, complete separation of his lot from that of Nadine, complete bursting of the old bonds, which would admit of no such half measure as friendship, was urged upon him now, even more peremptorily than when he had bidden her farewell before her departure for Italy.

At length, without looking up, he said in shaken but insistent tones,—

"You have made your lot. I must always grieve deeply that it is a wretched one. As long as I live you will be to me a bitter memory. But I see no way in which I can help or comfort you. To alter the past is impossible; and harking back upon it can only give useless pain to us both. Nadine, there is nothing I can say now which I have not urged in the old days, and speech seems a mockery. What right have I——? I used to tell you that in self-hatred lay the germ of effort. Try to think so. You *can*—you *must* make your life blessed."

Tears gathered in Nadine's eyes and fell slowly. Her lips quivered.

"It is only you who could ever have done anything for me," she whispered.

Bramwell could not bear to look at her. He rose and walked to the piano, against which he leaned, covering his face with his hand. She stretched out her arms to him imploringly, and said in a passionate manner,

"Are we not both wretched? We were mistaken. It would have been better if I

had put forth my strength and held you to me. I can still grieve you. Have I lost the power of making you happy?"

Again there was silence. Nadine had risen too, and stood, with head bent, facing Bramwell. Her breath came hard and thick, and a blush suffused her face.

Bramwell straightened himself and advanced a step towards her.

"Princess!" he said deliberately, "everything is changed between us now. You are right: Nadine is no more; and the old feelings are dead too, and can never return. We may still be conscious of pain in a wounded limb even when the limb has been taken away. So it is with my feeling towards you—it is only now the echo of a passionate love and a bitter pain. . . . But life cannot end when that mad love, which is known but once, dies and is buried. New affections, new duties spring up for us over its grave. And—I quote your own words—why should we not halt at the green places in the desert? why not gather the flowers which are so rare?"

I wished to avoid you. I would not have come to-day but that I had a definite object in view, which obliged me to seek you. After to-day, I would if I could, draw a veil between the past and the future. Perhaps I fear you still. Perhaps—I scarcely know what I feel. But I see a new existence opening before me, which has claims incompatible with the old. There is one way in which you can make me happier—this is the purpose which has brought me here. You can help me to win for my wife the woman whom I love.”

While he had been speaking Nadine’s face had grown slowly paler and more rigid. With a slow, stately movement she turned from him, and stood silent, with head bent and fingers lightly interlaced. Bramwell could only guess dimly at what was passing through her mind. In one of those swift and inexplicable flashes of memory, which under dissimilar circumstances connect phases of thought, certain words which Nadine had spoken years before recurred to him, seeming to stand forth in letters of fire.

"The very sense that I had power over you held the confession back. I could not endure to lose the power. And all that was worst in me came uppermost—it was like the taste of blood to a wild creature that has been brought up tame."

At length she turned again.

With all her marvellous self-command she could hardly have been conscious of the change which had taken place in her face. It was hard and grey as that of a corpse. All sweetness and womanliness had vanished from it. Her eyes gleamed with a pale fire, and her head was upraised, showing the spasmodic working of her throat.

Bramwell felt that the spiritual distance between them had suddenly become immeasurable. A sensation of repulsion came over him, which deepened as she answered in even, metallic tones—

"The lady whom you love is my friend, Margaret Blundell."

He bowed affirmatively.

"You ask my help in inducing her to

become your wife? I should not have supposed, Dr. Bramwell, that any inducement could be necessary; nor do I see now what assistance *I* can render you."

Bramwell directed a searching glance towards her face; but her eyes were lowered as she played with an ornament that hung from her *châtelaine*. He answered with a composure which emulated her own,—

"You are aware that in my house there resides now a child named Evelyn Gage, whom I call my ward. I charged myself with the care of this little girl under peculiar circumstances, which honour forbids me to reveal without the consent of her mother. Of late, remarks of the child's nurse, Mrs. Gaythorne, who, though pledged to secresy, has grown garrulous with age, and has always entertained her own convictions upon the subject, which I have never attempted to uproot, have aroused injurious suspicions concerning my relationship to the child. Mrs. Blundell has made these suspicions a pretext for forbidding me to

become her daughter's suitor. She absolutely refuses her consent to my marriage with Margaret unless I can offer her a full explanation of Evelyn's parentage, and my reasons for assuming her guardianship, exonerating myself from odium."

The Princess smiled icily and seated herself again, while she remarked with perfect and marvellous coolness,—

"Mrs. Blundell is a woman of the world; I know her well. It is surprising that she should be troubled by such refined scruples. But she is anxious that her daughter should marry Lord Seagrave. That was evident two years ago—at Rome. I wonder that she has not succeeded in carrying out her wishes—she usually does so. It is a pity that Margaret is so yielding in disposition. Entirely devoted as she is to her mother, she would sacrifice her own happiness rather than overleap any real or fancied obstacle which Mrs. Blundell might put forward. I am sorry for you in your difficulty, Dr. Bramwell, but I still fail to see how I can help you."

"Nadine!" exclaimed Bramwell excitedly, "you have a strong influence over Mrs. Blundell: this I know positively, though I am ignorant of the manner in which you have gained it. Perhaps your rank impresses her; perhaps you have lent her money."

"You are right," replied the Princess composedly. "I *have* lent her money—to pay her gambling debts at Nice."

"Exercise this influence upon my behalf. By means of your hold upon her, force her to consent to my marriage with Margaret. Is this a great thing for *me* to beg of *you*? I do not demand of you the sacrifice which I might claim, but which a man of honour has no right to exact from a woman. I do not bid you reveal your shame, or tell the tale of that miserable night at Croxham."

"*What night?*—you forget we decided that Nadine had ceased to exist. It is the Princess Titchakoff to whom you are appealing. And what has she to do with you, or with the child, your ward?—*nothing*. I refuse to exercise any influence which I may possess

over Mrs. Blundell for the furtherance of your marriage with Margaret."

Bramwell started back like one stunned by an unexpected blow, and stood gazing at Nadine in surprise and incredulous horror.

"Are you the woman I once loved—whom I believed to be the embodiment of all that is noble and true?" he cried in passionate upbraiding—"the woman who came to me in her despair, and whom I saved at the peril of my professional honour, at the sacrifice of all I held dearest? Is there no spark of gratitude or womanly feeling in your heart, no germ of motherhood in your bosom? Will you deny your own child?"

"I deny that I have ever borne a child," said the Princess unflinchingly. "If you can prove it, do so."

"*You must be mad!*" Goaded to fury, Bramwell darted forward and seized her wrist. "Are you not wearing on your finger the very ring which was the proof of your shame? Do you not know that I can denounce you to the world, to your husband?"

The Princess started to her feet, shaking herself free from his grasp. She retreated a few steps, and faced him like a hunted animal at bay. She was trembling visibly, but her eyes shot fire.

"You threaten me!" she said, in a tone of concentrated passion. "I defy you. Do your worst. Blare out to the world what you are pleased to call my shame. Go and proclaim that at Croxham, on such a night, I became the mother of a child whom you adopted as your ward. Who will believe your word, supported by that of an old woman in her dotage, against the evidence of your own actions—of your own handwriting?"

As Nadine spoke she touched the secret spring of an *escritoire* which stood near her, and drew a folded yellow sheet of paper from the receptacle which suddenly revealed itself. This she shook open and held out before him.

In an instant he had recognized it—the heading, Croxham; the date; the superscription. It was the letter which he had

written to Mr. Senguin, describing the alleged nature of Nadine's illness.

The Princess replaced the document. The sliding panel closed. She stood—her lips curling in a triumphant smile—mistress of the situation.

“Madam,” said Bramwell with ironical emphasis, bowing low before he withdrew, “you have mistaken your vocation. You would have made a great actress. I can say no more. You have turned against me the weapon with which I saved your life. Farewell.”

CHAPTER III.

CONQUERED.

WHEN Bramwell quitted the presence of Princess Titchakoff he suffered himself to be driven away, neither knowing nor caring whither. His whole being was in a tumult of disgust, passion, despair. Life seemed to hold no further good. Even the image of Margaret was blurred by the tears which he could not refrain from shedding over his broken bubble, his vanished ideal.

The day passed like a feverish dream. On his way home from one of his visits Bramwell drove through the Park, which at this hour was thronged; and at the distance of a few feet passed Nadine in the Ladies' Mile. She was sitting in her carriage, beautifully dressed, faintly flushed, and smiling with apparent animation upon a young *attaché* who faced

her. By her side was the wife of one of the foreign ambassadors. Suddenly she turned her head and met Bramwell's gaze levelled full at her. There was in her eyes and upon her tremulous lips an indefinable expression, which, with her vague allusions still fresh in his mind, revealed to him too surely the secret of her artificial vivacity. Hapless Nadine! slave to the worst tyranny which can hold a woman in thrall! Again there came over him the terrible feeling of watching her drown and of being unable to stretch forth a hand to save her. For the second during which they were face to face she looked at him unflinchingly, making not the slightest sign of recognition. Her carriage proceeded, but Bramwell's was detained for a minute or more by the pressure of the throng. As he waited, his ear caught the note of a falsetto voice which he knew, and he overheard the following brief dialogue interchanged between two people among the row of bystanders, whom he recognized respectively as Mrs. Bartelotte and Mr. Deodatus Lumley.

"So there's the Princess Titchakoff. Well, I guess *she* does not require much instruction in social philosophy. The world has gone better with her than it would have done if she had eloped with poor Jack Halkett. They are trying to do away with Providence now-a-days; but it is a convenient method of accounting for things, not that I am very partial to reasons. They are like the heavy bills that come in at Christmas after one has worn out one's gowns; but Jack Halkett's sudden death at that particular juncture—for nothing will ever persuade me there was not something behind the scenes—was one of those curious coincidences which require a special dispensation."

"Ah!" observed Mr. Lumley thoughtfully. "How well I remember reading the lines of Nadine Senguin's hand. I foretold drama in her life."

"You did not read her marriage lines," retorted Mrs. Bartelotte, "or you might have made your fortune on Ascot Heath long ago. As for drama, I should not wonder if our

pretty Princess had a precious deal of that before her. It is rumoured that Siberia is likely to be Titchakoff's last resting-place. I hear that the Emperor has discovered his Nihilist proclivities, and has recalled him to Russia."

"If I were not aware that no foreigner can understand Russian politics, I should be surprised that a man of Titchakoff's wealth and influence should compromise himself in revolutionary politics," said Mr. Lumley.

"You wouldn't say so if you had seen him tackle a mad dog as I once did," replied Mrs. Bartelotte. "Russians like to light their pipes beside a barrel of gunpowder. Titchakoff would compromise himself in any way provided there were a petticoat involved in the matter, and Vera Vassalis is at the bottom of his politics."

Late that evening Bramwell sat alone in his study. Eleven o'clock had long since struck. The house was still; and the fire which he had caused to be lighted—for the night was cold and chilly—burned low in the grate. Suddenly he was startled by the

sound of a peal from without. He rose nervously, and waited, listening to the footsteps of the servant who answered the summons. Then he heard a rapid parley in the hall, and a woman's voice, the tones of which thrilled him still, raised in imperious expostulation. Presently the door of his own room opened, and a lady was ushered in.

She was covered almost to her feet by a long mantle of some sombre rich stuff: and a black lace scarf was twisted round her throat and head, concealing the lower part of her face. But her pencilled brows and dark eyes, shining with a lustre almost unnatural, were visible; and it needed no second glance to convince Bramwell of the identity of his visitor. He saw before him the Princess Titchakoff.

She waited till the door had been closed again and they were alone; then loosening her cloak, let it fall behind her, and threw aside her disguising head-dress. She was in full evening costume of gleaming white satin and filmy lace; diamonds shone upon her

neck and arms, at her bosom, and in her hair; in her hands she carried a large bouquet of stephanotis and snowy carnations. She was evidently on her way to, or had just quitted some splendid entertainment.

He could not speak—surprise numbed his faculties; and yet, had he been capable of reflection, he might have considered that inconsistency was the only certain thing which could be predicted of Nadine.

She advanced—her shoulders bare and gleaming with her jewels—as a tragedy queen might have walked the stage, and stood facing him, her arm resting upon the mantelpiece, dazzling him by her magnificence and her beauty.

“I am the last person, after our interview to-day, whom you could have expected to see. Nevertheless, I have come. . . And not in my mood of this morning—that has passed. I am Nadine—variable as of old, impetuous, cruel, but not wholly heartless, not wholly ungrateful. I am here—” her voice faltered, and she stretched out her arms entreatingly

—"I have come to humble myself before you—to beseech you to forgive me."

She sank upon the ground at his feet and uplifted her face, transformed again—now all womanliness, full of tender pleading, childlike in its submission.

"You have borne so much, you have forgiven so much. And after to-night we may never meet again. Let us be at peace with each other. I do not wish to live in your heart a cruel memory. I do not wish you to hate me—you are too dear to me Think of me kindly sometimes, if always sorrowfully. I have done everything that you desired. If it lies in my power to make you happy you shall be so. To-morrow go to Mrs. Blundell—you will find that all opposition on her part is withdrawn. Margaret shall be yours. Nay, more—I have written my confession to her, which I give to you. Maybe that you will wish to justify yourself to your wife. That confession is my expiation of the wrong I have done you."

He tried to raise her.

“Nadine! Nadine!” he cried in a choked voice. “It is I who am cruel.”

She shook her head, smiling mournfully.

“No. Sit here, and let me remain so. I have something to give you.”

She drew from her bosom two documents: one was creased and yellow—this she cast into the bed of coals and watched burning till it was consumed to blackness; the other, a sealed envelope directed to Margaret Blundell, she placed in his hand.

“I have destroyed your letter to my father. In this I have told Margaret everything. You will forgive me now? . . . I said—that it was only you who could ever make me do any good thing. Oh, I wish you well—I hope you may be happy.”

Sobs checked her utterance. He raised her two hands to his lips; she felt tears fall hot upon them.

“I have only one thing to beg of you. I place no restrictions upon your use of this letter. It may be shown to Margaret before or after your marriage, as you will. But do

not give it to her till a fortnight has passed. By that time I shall have left England. I am going with my husband to Russia."

Bramwell uttered an exclamation of horror.

"There is no cause for alarm," answered Nadine composedly. "And if there were, what matter?—women such as I am, bear charmed lives. If misery could kill I should have died long ago. And of what consequence whether I die in a Russian palace or a Siberian hovel?—life has no more sweetness for me."

She raised herself, and stood leaning against the mantel-shelf. Her eyes wandered round the room, noting everything; it was as though she were trying to imprint upon her memory all the details and surroundings of his life. At last her gaze rested upon him in sadness indescribable. Her lips quivered, and a deep-drawn sob shook her frame.

Intense yearning filled Bramwell's heart, and swept from it every other feeling. He saw in her only Nadine, forsaken, wretched—a lost soul going into darkness. Again

he clasped her hands, kissing them wildly; a torrent of passionate entreaty burst from his lips. He might have been praying for his own happiness, so urgent were his words. He implored her, for his sake, for the sake of her youth, to take pity upon herself. He besought her to try and build up the ruins of her life, to be true to her real nature, to make of her sorrow a baptism into a worthier future.

Nadine tried to speak, but voice failed her. When he had ceased she remained motionless, her hands still clasped in his, her face wearing almost the expression of one who has lost consciousness. At last there seemed to come a revival of feeling; tears began to fall anew, and she said, with an effort at calmness,—

“It is of no use; I can never be different. It will be best for me if I can grow completely hard, and not care—after to-night. . . . But to-night I should like—it is a strange wish for me. . . . I want to see my child, if it be possible.”

"You shall see her. I will bring her to you," answered Bramwell.

He left the room. After a few minutes he returned, bearing the little girl in his arms. She was fast asleep. Her rounded limbs drooped helplessly; the tiny head, with face upturned, rested upon his shoulder, over which fell the tangled masses of her fair hair.

Nadine bent forward with a strange, pathetic movement. Upon her face was a struggling expression of wonder, awe, tenderness; but she made no effort to kiss the child or to take it in her arms.

"She is very pretty," said Nadine in a choked whisper, lifting the little hand, and stroking it softly and timidly—"not like me. She is like—her father."

Then suddenly the unhappy woman uttered a smothered cry and flung herself upon the sofa. Burying her face in her hands, she wept convulsively.

But the paroxysm did not last long. When it had passed she rose, tearless and white,

and automatically fastened her mantle and adjusted her scarf.

"Farewell," she said.

Again she paused before Bramwell, and the mother's instinct awoke and cried. She held out her arms, and clasped the child to her bosom. Evelyn's eyes opened, large, dark, wistful, but showing no terror of the agonized face bent over hers. With a sleepy gesture she lifted her hands caressingly to her mother's cheek.

Nadine murmured some faint, inarticulate words of endearment. She strained the child closer to her heart, and kissed passionately the unconscious lips, then thrust her again into Bramwell's arms, and went forth silently to play in the world that part which she had chosen.

EXTRACT FROM A LETTER TO
THE AUTHOR.

"I HAVE tried, as you requested, to glean from Calderwood some further particulars of the career of Nadine, Princess Titchakoff, but with no success. He hints darkly at a certain diplomatic mission to St. Petersburg in which he was at one period of his life engaged, and during which presumably he became acquainted with the Princess's secret. In what manner I know not, but there is room for conjecture, that for the second time in her life her strange, complex, emotional nature required the safety-valve of confession; and Calderwood may have enacted the part of another Bramwell. He has intimated to me that to reveal more would be a violation of honour, and possibly involve him in the betrayal of State secrets; and I am bound to respect his reticence. The close of your narrative strikes me as being somewhat

abrupt, and as hardly fulfilling the dramatic essentials which the opening would appear to indicate. But it must be remembered that these events really occurred some twenty-five or thirty years ago; and that for purposes of fiction you have transposed their key, in order to meet the actualities of modern fashion, society, language, and Americanisms. Thus, to strike fresh chords, or to pursue further the struggles and failures of Nadine, would involve you in anachronisms and inconsistencies, which you now happily avoid.

“But Calderwood’s vague hints set the mind working; and the respective mental and moral attitudes of our *dramatis personæ* offer an interesting field for speculation to the social philosopher and dabbler in the mysteries of human relationships.

“I am assured that Bramwell and his wife are, in spite of the anxious and pessimist temperament of the former, supremely happy. An opportune attack of rheumatic fever carried off Mrs. Blundell shortly after her daughter’s marriage to our excellent, if slightly priggish,

physician ; otherwise I should be disposed to cherish a doubt of the felicity which my friend describes in enthusiastic terms.

“ Mrs. Bramwell has never had children, but has always exhibited a marked attachment to her husband’s ward. The beauty of this lady, now the wife of Lord —, ambassador at the Court of —, has for some time been the theme of society journals ; and mysterious rumours concerning her parentage are still in circulation, vaguely inferring that blood no less azure than that of foreign royalty flows in her veins.

“ Have she and the Princess Titchakoff ever held hands or brushed garments in fashionable Roman salons or on crowded Parisian staircases ? Upon this point Calderwood is silent.

“ Bramwell is, I am told, one of the most celebrated physicians in Europe, famous for psychological discovery, and for the successful treatment of maladies connected with the nerves and brain. What a sign of the times and of the deterioration of the human species, that this branch of physiology is becoming

the *spécialité* of the age! I have always proclaimed the fallacy of the positivist theory of eternity. Before the race can be enabled to attain an earthly immortality, it must first be endowed by science with a sound digestion and an improved nervous system warranted to withstand the ravages of civilization."

THE END.

1. The first part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

2. The second part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

3. The third part of the document is a list of names and addresses of the members of the committee.

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